

# FUTURE OF SYRIA

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JOINT POLICY STUDY

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## Foreword

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Projecting a potential government structure for post-conflict Syria is a cumbersome task after forty years of single-family rule. The fragmentation within the Syrian opposition both inside and outside Syria is manifest. The political vacuum in Syria has widened and the Syrian opposition finds it difficult to reach a consensus with regards to political leadership, developing a common vision, representation and building a new Syrian government apparatus. Additionally, post-conflict Syria would have to deal with issues such as national reconciliation, protection of minorities, reform of the security sector and reconstruction and development.

Taking into consideration that these are no mean feats and will require significant investments and contributions from all stakeholders, this Future of Syria Project has attempted to explore possible ideas that may come up with alternative mechanisms for addressing those issues.

Nonetheless, this project has been challenging due to four main factors: the volatility of the situation on the ground; the complexity of the situation and the multiplicity of actors involved in the Syrian conflict (with the uncertainty of the US position adding to this complexity); the ongoing hostilities that prevented the authors of the Joint Policy Study chapters from conducting field research; and the inability of the series of peace talks to birth a peaceful resolution.

It is imperative to emphasise that the primary discussants of Syrian issues should be the Syrians themselves as they will be the main stakeholders at the negotiating table that will eventually determine the fate of the country. Third parties will contribute to the determination of this framework by considering their own interests. In a nutshell, the intersection of the optimum interests and expectations of global, regional and local actors as well as cues drawn from other conflicts will lead to a resolution of the Syrian conflict.

We hope the efforts of all the authors and stakeholders in this project, including two policy recommendation papers, will add to the ongoing efforts towards a sustainable resolution of the Syrian conflict and the rebuilding of post-conflict Syria.

## **State-Building: Political, Structural and Legal Issues**

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## Introduction

More than half a decade into the Syrian Civil War, the conflict has only become increasingly more complex on the domestic, regional and international levels. In addition, all diplomatic efforts have stagnated or reached an impasse; the humanitarian crisis continues to exacerbate; and the immense destruction of the country and its societal fabric has not, on any scale, ceased. Despite a glimmer of hope in Astana in late 2016, the Syrian Civil War has continued.

As each party to the conflict struggles to secure a territory and outcome that maximises its sustainable survival, the country now faces the possible scenario of being divided into autonomous statelets, governed by the current regime, non-state actors, ethnic or sectarian minorities. Holding a strategic position at the core of the Middle East that borders Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, the consequences of the Syrian crisis pose a regional security concern to several countries in the Middle East, North Africa and Europe.

Taking these circumstances into consideration, this chapter tries to envision and discuss a potential post-settlement political system in Syria, based on the previous experiences both in Syria and elsewhere, the UN documents and the other works by the think tank community. As a roadmap for the chapter, the first section explores the trajectory of the Syrian conflict and presents an overview of various attempts to end it. It continues with the positions of the main stakeholders in the conflict and the outlines of a possible future political settlement, thereby highlighting the political issues that underpin diplomatic efforts. Subsequently, the chapter deals with the structural issues that would need to be addressed during a transition period. Lastly, it projects possible scenarios for future political settlement in Syria.

In spite of the fact that the normative stance of the authors of this study is to build in Syria a complete democracy based on universal human rights, and to protect the balance between legislative, executive and judicial bodies; the forthcoming pages will give weight to the possible rather than the ideal. This is certainly not an attempt to draft a constitution for Syria. We will only emphasise which elements must be considered in the formulation of a new constitution or regulations in the constitution that will help bring sustainable peace to Syria.

Our main recommendation regarding this process is to not further postpone the production or the alteration of the constitution, to ensure that the main legal regulations

that will determine the future of Syria are part of the peace agreement that would be signed among the parties. Another recommendation is to ratify these regulations by the UN Security Council and to look for the consent of the UN Security Council for the changes in the main articles in a timeframe determined by the parties.

## Overview of the Conflict's Development

Following mass demonstrations in Tunisia and Egypt that broke out in December 2010 and January 2011, respectively, on 6 March, in Syria, fifteen teenagers were arrested for writing anti-government graffiti, making the same claim, on the walls of a school in Dara'a (Sterling, 2012), a southern Syrian city located near the border with Jordan. The punishment and mistreatment of the teenagers became a catalyst for the mobilisation of the city dwellers. The protest became more violent as days passed. On 18 March, thousands gathered in Dara'a in order to demand the release of the teenagers while also calling for democracy, freedom of speech, political freedom and an end to corruption. Three protesters were killed by the security forces during the demonstrations ("Guide. Syria Crisis", 2012).

The unrest in Dara'a soon turned into a nationwide protest, however, with the escalation of the violence, demanding the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad. As a response to the demonstrations, 260 political prisoners were released ("Syria Turmoil: Political Inmates 'Freed' After Protests", 2011), the state of emergency, which continued for 48 years, was ended, and the right of citizenship was granted to some 120,000 stateless Kurds in Syria, who were excluded from citizenship rights after the population census conducted in 1962 ("Syria To Lift Emergency Law", 2011). Increased use of force by the security forces on the demonstrators broke the resilience of the protesters. However, the protesters began to take up arms, to defend themselves and their cities. By July 2011, Syria saw the demonstrations turn into an armed conflict. Over time, it was not only the regime forces versus the opposition forces, ethnically and religiously several different factions came into being: the Syrian Government and its various supporters, Sunni Arab opposition groups (most notably the Free Syrian Army, which coalesced around opposition armed groups in Syrian cities), Kurdish groups and Jihadist groups.

In the summer of 2012, Syria witnessed an increase in violence on all sides. Soon the conflict inside Syria began to be referred to as civil war, which later on evolved into a proxy war as both the Baathist regime and the opposition became reliant on the support given by external powers (Hughes, 2014). The international community strived to solve

the conflict through diplomatic contacts but there were difficulties reaching a solution because of divisions within the Syrian opposition and the discord between the other parties, including the Syrian regime. The focus of negotiations was to find a solution to decrease the violence on the ground, rather than to secure a political solution.

The fight against terrorism has become the priority for the international community rather than the replacement of President Bashar al-Assad. Terrorist groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and al-Nusra has been the major concern both inside and outside Syria as the terror attacks hit different geographical regions from France to Turkey. In September 2015, Russia's military intervention in Syria against ISIS, which has claimed a significant part of Syria's territories, has been a breaking point in Syria's civil war as it turned strongly in favour of President Bashar al-Assad's regime and the opposition forces began to have increasingly narrow territorial pockets (Favier, 2017).

For the non-Jihadist opposition groups, one significant territorial loss to the Syrian regime, with the support of Russians and Iranians, was Aleppo in late 2016. As one Syrian scholar put it, "it symbolises a defeat for the Syrian Revolution's civilian and military forces" (Favier, 2017). After the loss of Aleppo, people who were staying in the city were evicted, which also meant the eviction of civil activists, for whom Aleppo became a fortress to defend.

In the humanitarian crisis prompted by the civil war, almost half of Syria's population has been displaced. While over 6.6 million Syrians have been internally displaced, many had to flee their country due to the conflict. Nearby countries Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey have inevitably been affected by the tension in Syria while also welcoming many Syrians to their countries. On 22 April 2016, Staffan de Mistura, United Nations Special Envoy to Syria, said in a speech following a week of peace talks, that the Syrian conflict has probably claimed 400,000 deaths ("Syria Envoy Claims 400,000 Have Died in Syria Conflict", 2016).

## A Glimmer of Hope

Since 2011, there have been several attempts at resolution of the Syrian conflict. The first were the Arab League peace initiatives in 2011 and 2012. Between November 2011 and January 2012, the Arab League twice attempted to resolve the conflict by bringing the Syrian government and opposition factions to the table. After agreement of the Syrian government with the Arab League peace plan, the Arab League dispatched a monitoring

mission to Syria. However, violence persisted and Saudi Arabia subsequently withdrew its efforts on 22 January 2012 and invited Russia, China, the US and other states to pressure Syria to abide by the Arab League peace plan. Lack of success with the Arab League peace plan led to the cancellation of the monitoring mission on 28 January 2012 (Sly, 2011).

The Arab League peace plan was followed by the Russian peace initiative for Syria. The Russian Foreign Ministry suggested informal talks between the Syrian government and opposition in Moscow on 30 January 2012, a dialogue that was turned down as the opposition maintained they had not received any formal invitation (“Syria Agrees to Informal Talks in Moscow”, 2012). Attempts in February 2012 witnessed Marti Ahtisaari holding talks with permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. A three-point plan proposal by the Russian Ambassador to the UN, Vitaly Churkin, purposed to bring the Syrian government and opposition to the negotiating table but failed. According to Ahtisaari, the US, Britain and France predicted al-Assad’s fall as inevitable (Borger & Inzaurrealde, 2012).

The Friends of Syria Group in 2012 through former French President Nicolas Sarkozy also initiated an international “contact group” aimed at finding a solution to the conflict after Russia and China had vetoed a 4 February 2012 UN Security Council Resolution meant to broker a ceasefire to end the conflict. They held a further four meetings in an unsuccessful attempt to broker a peace deal (Shadid & Macfarquhar, 2012). In March 2012, the Kofi Annan (Joint Special Envoy for the United Nations and the Arab League) peace plan was initiated with the objective of committing both the Syrian government and opposition to a ceasefire. Upon the assumption that both parties had consented to the ceasefire agreement on 12 April 2012, it became clear that both parties were violating it by 1 May 2012 (UN Security Council, 2012a).

The Geneva I Conference on Syria was held on 30 June 2012 under the tutelage of UN peace envoy to Syria, Kofi Annan and attended by the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi and British Foreign Secretary William Hague. According to Annan, the conference agreed on the need for a transitional government body with full executive powers that could include members of the present Syrian government and the opposition. According to Hague, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, Russia, China, France and the UK supported Annan’s efforts but Clinton indicated that al-Assad could not remain in power in such a transitional government. Lavrov refuted this, which led to a stalemate of the initiative. However, the Action Group for Syria final communiqué was launched (Action Group for Syria, 2012).

The 16th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement held from 26 to 31 August 2012 in Tehran with 120 participating countries saw Iran's intention to come up with a plan aimed at resolving the Syrian conflict. However, a consensus was not reached among the leaders (Non-Aligned Movement, 2012). The Eid al-Adha ceasefire attempt was on 1 September 2012. Lakhdar Brahimi, an Algerian diplomat, then the new UN Arab League special representative for Syria, appealed for a stop to the killings by the Syrian government and the armed opposition during the Islamic festival of Eid al-Adha on 26 October 2012. The Syrian government and opposition groups agreed to his appeal but the ceasefire was short-lived (Weaver &Whitaker, 2012).

Russia subsequently indicated a brokerage proposal on 7 November 2013, which according to its Deputy Foreign Minister, Bogdanov, was to focus on humanitarian issues. This was mainly due to the fact that Russian negotiators and the US had failed to agree on the fate of al-Assad (Barnard, 2013). Due to the unsuccessful previous attempts to reach a resolution to the conflict, the Conference on Syria in the framework of the Geneva II Middle East Peace Conference backed by the UN was organised. It planned to bring the Syrian government and opposition to the negotiating table to discuss a transitional government. Lakhdar Brahimi pursued the conference in close cooperation with the US and Russia. The conference began on 22 January 2014 and ended on 31 January with no agreement reached (Shabaneh, 2013).

Pursuant to the failure of the Brahimi Conference, the Astana Peace Talks for Syrian opposition groups was convened in Astana in May 2015 and October 2015 respectively under the tutelage of Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev. The meeting failed to produce any significant result but Staffan de Mistura, UN envoy to Syria, initiated the Four Committees Initiative on 29 July 2015 to restart the peace process, as there had been no peace talk initiatives pursuant to the end of the Geneva II talks. The proposal unsuccessfully suggested that the Syrian government set up a four themed committee to address primary concerns of a possible ceasefire, reconstruction, political election process, and military and security concerns.

After a short-lived Zabadani Ceasefire Agreement led by Hezbollah, the Vienna Process was kick-started by the foreign ministers of the US, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Turkey to find a way to end the conflict. The first round of Syrian peace talks on 30 October 2015 led to ministers agreeing to the need to start political dialogue. The second round was held in mid-November 2015 and indicated an agreement to bring together the Syrian government and opposition representatives in formal negotiations under UN auspices with 1 January 2016 as a target date.

The 10 December 2015 Riyadh conference on Syrian opposition groups also aimed to unify the opposition and form a coalition to begin negotiations with the Syrian government. Syrian Kurds were absent alongside the al-Qaeda linked faction of Jabhat al-Nusra. An agreement emerged on 12 December when 34 opposition groups allied themselves as the High Negotiation Committee (HNC). On 18 December 2015, the UN Security Council, having overcome the constant hindrances to the Syrian conflict, unanimously passed Resolution 2254 endorsing the International Syria Support Group's transitional plan that set out the timetable for formal talks and a unity government within six months; with the resolution putting UN special envoy Staffan de Mistura in charge of organising the Syria talks. After several failed attempts, the talks between Turkey and Russia in Astana resulted in the two states brokering a nationwide Syrian ceasefire that was implemented on 30 December 2016 and still holds at the time of writing, despite occasional violations.

## Key Stakeholders

The Syrian conflict has an exceptionally high number of players with contending agendas. Thus, coordination between the various parties and groups is needed in order to reach an agreement on a political settlement in Syria. That said, throughout the past six years of the conflict, a number of parties have emerged as the key facilitators, influencers and stakeholders in the negotiations pertaining to any political settlement on the future of Syria. On the one hand, the local parties making up the Syrian regime, headed by President Bashar al-Assad; the High Negotiations Committee (HNC), representing a wide array of opposition groups; and the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), acting on behalf of both PKK affiliated Kurdish and to a limited extent some Arab groups in northern Syria.<sup>1</sup> And on the other hand, the main international party is the International Syria Support Group (ISSG), which is constituted by all the key external players in the conflict.

### Al-Assad's Regime

At the heart of the conflict lies Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who initially refused to answer popular calls for political reforms and responded with violence. As the Syrian Civil War rages on indefinitely, the regime – which is supported militarily and politically by Russia, Iran and Hezbollah – remains resilient and able to consolidate its control over much of western Syria, including Damascus, Homs and Hama (Dobbins, Gordon, & Martini, 2016). And to further tighten its grip on the country's western province, the

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<sup>1</sup> A Russian-backed moderate opposition called the Hmeymim Group (also known as the Moscow Group) split in June 2016 to form another group called "The Alternative for the Sake of Syria". However, as of 5 October 2016, there is still scarce information, in both Arabic and English, on the newly-formed opposition group.

regime has launched a final offensive led by 10,000 troops against rebel groups in east Aleppo with the aim of regaining control of the strategic city, which he finally did in December 2016 with Russian and Iranian assistance (Gilbert, 2016).

Despite the uninterrupted fighting that has resulted in the enormous loss of life, internal and external forced displacement, regional instability and increased radicalisation, al-Assad still vows to continue his “war on terrorism” to “liberate every inch of Syria” (Yeranian, 2016). The same position is likewise adopted by his regime in the peace talks, where the Permanent Representative of Syria to the UN Bashar al-Jaafari has consistently refused to negotiate with the opposition until recently, let alone discuss the departure of al-Assad or specifics of a transition period. This refusal, along with the expanding territorial gains in western Syria, has made certain that the regime will remain a key political player in a prospective political transition and possibly throughout Syria’s foreseeable future.

### **The High Negotiations Committee**

Standing in opposition to President Bashar al-Assad’s regime is a broad spectrum of opposition groups that was brought together in December 2015 through a meeting coordinated in Riyadh by Saudi Arabia, the United States and several other states of the Friends of Syria. The opposition groups allied in the High Negotiations Committee (HNC), on the one hand, included exiled politicians, military defectors and armed rebel groups; and, on the other, excluded hard-line Jihadist extremists like ISIS and formerly known as al-Nusra Front, the Fat’h al-Sham Front (FSF) (Lund, 2015).

Initially, in January 2016, the HNC proposed that the negotiation process be guided by the following four points: first, the establishment of an inclusive government, without President Bashar al-Assad and his current regime; second, the protection of Syria’s territorial integrity; third, the implementation of deep structural reforms of state institutions, while preserving them; and fourth, the rejection of violent extremism and terrorist groups associated with it (GPoT Center, 2016). However, following the UN’s indefinite suspension of the Geneva III talks, due to the failure of the parties to produce any tangible results, the HNC presented its vision of a political settlement in September 2016 within a document entitled, “Executive Framework for a Political Solution Based on the Geneva Communiqué (2012)”.

### **The Syrian Democratic Council**

As a response to the conference convened by rebel opposition groups in Riyadh, the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) – linked to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK),

supported by the US and operating under the political umbrella of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) – similarly organised in December 2016 its own conference in the northeast Syrian town of Rmeilan. The meeting was concluded with the formation of a political branch to the SDF named the Syrian Democratic Council (Lund, 2015). It is pertinent to note that PKK is recognised as a terrorist organisation by the EU and the US in addition to many other countries and is at war with Turkey. Although an organic link between PYD and PKK is very well established by academic and policy communities, both the US and the Russian Federation so far refrained from acknowledging this fact to the dismay of Turkey.

Encouraged by the support they have been receiving, the PYD has acted steadfastly to consolidate its grip on northern Syria<sup>2</sup>. Only three months after the Rmeilan conference, on 17 March 2016, the Kurdish group, along with several allied groups, declared the Federal Democratic System of Rojava and Northern Syria in the Kurdish-controlled north (Sheikho, 2016). Explaining the declaration, the PYD claimed that the federal system would function within the framework of a political solution to the Syrian crisis and comply with the ultimate goal of Syrian unity. In response, the regime, opposition (both the Arab and Kurdish<sup>3</sup>) and Turkey all rejected the unilateral declaration. Unfazed, the PYD unabatedly continued developing its autonomy project in Syria and in July 2016 approved a social contract of 85 articles to serve as the region's constitution (Drwish, 2016).

### The International Syria Support Group (ISSG)

During the fall of 2015, around the time of the above-mentioned opposition meetings, a concert of 20 members<sup>4</sup>, co-chaired by the US and Russia and encompassing all key external stakeholders in the conflict, convened to address the pressing aspects of the Syrian conflict that perpetuate the humanitarian crisis, destabilise regional security and contribute to the increased capacity of terrorist groups. In that context, and despite the deep divisions that remained on key issues,<sup>5</sup> the ISSG established a set of principles and a timeline to guide the process of a political settlement in Syria. This paved the way for UN Security Council Resolution 2254, which was unanimously passed on 18 December 2015.

Pursuant to these efforts, the ISSG attempted to facilitate sustainable ceasefires and negotiations multiple times only to see them collapse or postponed, as exhibited by the ceasefire agreement of September 2016. This led senior diplomats and analysts to highlight two main points with regards to the diplomatic efforts of the Support Group: first, that bilateral discussions between key players such as the US and Russia, and

<sup>2</sup> Kurdish-controlled cantons in northern Syria include Jazira, Kobani, Afrin and Tel Abyad.

<sup>3</sup> The KNC aligns itself with the HNC in Geneva. However, the PYD remains the most powerful actor on the ground in north Syria.

<sup>4</sup> The Arab League, China, Egypt, the EU, France, Germany, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United Nations and the United States (US Department of State, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Such as the departure of al-Assad, backing of certain rebel groups, and designation of terrorist groups.



Saudi Arabia and Iran, must be strengthened to reach enforceable agreements that account for and resolve existing contentious issues (Dobbins, Gordon, & Martini, 2015); and second, that the balance of power on the battlefield between al-Assad's regime and the opposition be favourable to a new power-sharing government in the country (O'Hanlon, 2016).

## Turkey

Turkey, sharing a 911 km border with Syria and hosting more than 3 million refugees, had been following a rather cautious path with regard to the conflict. At the initial stages of the conflict, Ankara hoped to use its moral leverage over Damascus in vain. Foreign Minister Davutoğlu's tête-à-tête meeting with President al-Assad in August 2011 did not produce any result. None of the reforms promised was initiated and in late 2011 relations between the sides were remarkably soured. Turkey in the meantime extended support to opposition groups both politically and militarily. Yet, it refrained from any direct intervention to the conflict, even after a Turkish RF-E4 reconnaissance plane was shot down by the Syrian forces on 22 June 2012. The same attitude continued until 24 August 2016.

On that day, responding to the ISIS threat and aiming to contain increasing PKK influence over northern Syria through PYD with its military wing YPG, the Turkish air force and the special forces together with some elements of the Free Syrian Army launched an offensive, called Euphrates Shield operation. Since then, Turkey has taken almost 1500 km<sup>2</sup> of a land mass previously controlled by ISIS. However, Turkey's main role in the Syrian conflict cannot be reduced to Euphrates Shield operation. Ankara supports the attempts to finding a peaceful solution to the Syrian conflict, advocating Syrian territorial integrity. Due to an ongoing war with the PKK, Turkey is opposing any attempt that would involve PYD and/or SDC in a dialogue about a future Syrian political settlement.

## Iran

Iran's ambition to expand its influence in post-conflict Syria and the region explains its backing of the Syrian regime. Iran envisions the survival of its Alawite client and the preservation of Syria as a conduit for Iranian support to Hezbollah.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, it has opted to project itself as a possible mediator in an eventual negotiated settlement. This has left other actors in the region disturbed at the prospect of a potential unitary government of Syria being shepherded by Iran. The Syrian conflict has already affected

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<sup>6</sup> According to Israel, Iran is orchestrating Hezbollah's expansion into the Syrian-controlled sector of the Golan Heights to consolidate its future strategic positioning against Israel (Geranmayeh, 2015).

the position of Iran in the region (Fulton, Holliday, & Wyer 2013). Essentially, a post-Sunni Syria is unlikely to remain an ally of Iran. In other words, Iran will suffer isolation should al-Assad fall.

### Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's opposition to the Baath regime, on the other hand, is anchored in inhibitions that include geopolitical dominance (Calabrese, 2012). Strategically, Saudi Arabia opts for a new unitary chapter of post-conflict Syria that will not be in alliance with Iran. On the domestic front, the conflict in Syria has presented an avenue for senior clerics to increase anti-sectarian tendencies resulting in strings of disaffection and alienation among Saudi Shia youth. Effectively, it is the culmination of political and sectarian inhibitions that has primed Saudi Arabia as one of the foremost actors in the region proposing an end to the conflict. A stance reflected in Saudi financial backing of the opposition and its subsequent support of the Friends of Syria Meeting. It joined 100 other countries in Marrakesh in vouching for the National Coalition for the Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as the legitimate representatives of the Syrian people and pledged \$100 million in aid to the opposition (Talmon, 2013).

### Iraq

Iraq is currently in a fragile makeshift condition in the region. The ethno-sectarian formation of its government has moved from Sunni to Shia dominated, a centre to the periphery nature of authority. Iraq enjoys closer ties with Iran than Moscow in previous years and the nature of its domestic issues makes it unable to be a major influence in the Syrian conflict. Nonetheless, Iraq is concerned about the potential influx of returnee refugees (former Baathists) from the Syrian conflict and anti-government insurgencies<sup>7</sup> from safe havens in Syria. Iraq is also particularly disturbed about the prospects of a Sunni-dominated post-President Bashar al-Assad regime alongside the prospects of Iraqi-Kurdish factions (Carpenter, 2016).

### Lebanon

The situation in Syria has also had a serious impact on Lebanon, with a massive influx of refugees in Lebanon whose social services are underfunded and understaffed,<sup>8</sup> a situation the country is ill-prepared to deal with. Additionally, it has ignited Sunni-Shia tensions at the community and national levels and widened the impasse between Hezbollah and the Free Movement. The latter is in a fragile situation due to its support

<sup>7</sup> The Iraqi government now believes that a victory for the rebels in Syria will mean not just a post-al-Assad neighbour under the influence of hostile Gulf forces intent on destabilising Maliki's rule, but also a resurgent al-Qaeda at home (Carpenter, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Over 1 million refugees are changing the country's demographics, straining its social contract, and putting pressure on its economy (Khatib, 2014).

for the Syrian regime. Hezbollah, on the other hand, dreads an outright victory by the Syrian opposition that will lead to the removal of President Bashar al-Assad (Khatib, 2014). It is concerned with a Sunni-dominated post-al-Assad era that may adopt an anti-Hezbollah stance in Lebanon. Some parties in Lebanon thus dread the emergence of a strong Sunni central state in the future of Syria.

## Israel

Israel has opted against any entanglement in the Syrian conflict. Irrespective of this, any political settlement that enshrines Iran as a dominant actor will inextricably be a cause for concern. Iran's potential ability to threaten Israel's northern borders resulting in the destabilisation of Lebanese and Jordanian politics can interfere with anxieties of Iraq Sunnis and bring them back into alignment with the government of Baghdad. This potential scenario of an Iran-dominated Syria and subsequent weapon transfer to Hezbollah through Damascus has warranted Israel treading carefully. Israel dreads that asymmetric wars that could be forged by Hezbollah could come at a huge civilian cost to its citizens (Manfreda, 2016).

## United States

Even though the United States claims it has no direct stakes in the Syrian conflict, preserving Syria is a vital national security interest. It fears a Syria where ISIS will have safe havens and from where it could launch attacks,<sup>9</sup> a global refugee crisis and the potential spillover of the conflict to other neighbouring countries. A political settlement spearheaded by the US would be seen as the US rectifying its credibility deficit in the region, though it has failed diplomatically in recent times. Yet active involvement of the US without taking into account the regional political realities may lead to further complications.

Today, two US approaches towards Syria can be outlined: the kind of policy Obama followed and how Trump's presidency might affect Syria and also the Middle East. Unlike Russia, the US has not militarily intervened in the conflict. Nevertheless, Salafist extremism has been its primary concern for years. Fighting against ISIS became a considerable factor of US policy during Obama's administration while paying lip service to al-Assad's departure. Donald Trump seems to attribute relatively more priority to defeating radical groups than his predecessor. This may provide ground for compromise with other powers. One can expect more conciliatory American policy vis-à-vis the al-Assad regime.

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<sup>9</sup> President Obama's policy of non-intervention in Syria, with the exception of the campaign against ISIS, which deliberately avoids confrontation with the Syrian government and the Russians, is not an anomaly; it follows a script of international relations that determines intervention on the basis of national interest (Issa, 2016).

## Russia

Since the start of the conflict, Russia has played a double role, often contradictory but at times complimentary. On the one hand, Russia was an ally of the al-Assad regime, thus part of the conflict and, on the other hand, facilitator of almost any potential dialogue solution. For Russia, Syria comes into prominence due to its military presence in the Mediterranean and in particular the naval facility in Tartus. The location of Syria in connection with the gas pipeline is ostensibly also a factor. Russia regards radical Islamist groups as a threat to its own domestic stability as it hosts more than 20 million Muslims citizens. Moreover, Russia believes that should President Bashar al-Assad be removed without a mutually accepted successor, Syria risks becoming a failed state. This will provide safe havens for ISIS to consolidate its positions. In addition to providing military hardware, the al-Assad regime initiated an active military intervention against the opposition in September 2015.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, thousands of civilians, including children, have become victims of airstrikes since then. However, Russian support in the air and Iranian involvement on the ground coupled with limited involvement of the US and many European governments had a major impact on the balance of power in Syria. If it was not for Russian balancing acts, the regime could hardly survive the civil war and recapture the territories lost at its initial stages. Yet the Russian Federation earnestly supported a political solution serving mostly the interests of the regime. Russia was instrumental in bringing and maintaining the ceasefire achieved in Astana in late December 2016. Russia also proposed, though unofficially, in Astana in January 2017, an 85-article draft constitution, which was rejected by all the stakeholders, including the regime.

## United Nations and EU

The United Nations suspended its missions in Syria on 16 June 2012 citing escalation of violence. It has since been one of the main conduits of humanitarian assistance in Syria alongside engaging in diplomatic efforts, such as the Geneva Process, that attempt to broker peace. It also adopted UN Security Council Resolution 2254 in December 2015, which endorses a roadmap for a peace process in Syria. The UN welcomes a peaceful political settlement that allows the country to rebuild.<sup>10</sup> The European Union is affected by the Syrian conflict, mainly the conundrum associated with the refugee crisis. Whilst it has played a distant role in political terms (due to divisions among its member states and the lack of diplomatic clout and despite determined efforts undertaken by the

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<sup>10</sup> Security Council Unanimously Adopts Resolution 2254 (2015), Endorsing Road Map for Peace Process in Syria, Setting Timetable for Talks.

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini), it has constantly condemned the attacks on civilians and called for a peaceful political settlement, adopted consistent sanctions against the spoilers<sup>11</sup> and has been a leading donor to the international response to the crisis.

## Structural Issues and Transitional Justice

Though several obstacles have stalled a political settlement in Syria, the past six years of diplomatic efforts have produced a framework of agreed upon guiding principles for the peace process, starting with a ceasefire agreement, progressing with negotiations, and eventually leading to a new constitution and elections. These principles of a long-term settlement are delineated, although ambiguously in some cases, in the Geneva Communiqué of 2012, UN Security Resolution 2254, the UN Special Envoy's Paper on the Points of Commonalities, and the HNC's Executive Framework for a Political Solution Based on the Geneva Communiqué (2012). As there are several overlaps among the documents, which often reference each other, this section will outline the general framework of the guiding principles according to the thematic issues expressed within their texts. The thematic issues are divided into commitments, rapid steps and transition.

The commitments among the Geneva Communiqué of 2012, UN Security Resolution 2254, and the UN Special Envoy's Paper on the Points of Commonalities emanate from three main points, out of which several others mentioned in the documents arise.<sup>12</sup> First, that the key players respect the “sovereignty, independence, national unity, and territorial integrity of Syria [...] [while meeting] the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and [enabling] them independently and democratically to determine their own future” (UN Security Council, 2012b).

In this regard, Syria is envisioned to be a genuinely democratic and pluralistic non-sectarian state that “complies with international standards on human rights, the independence of the judiciary, accountability of those in government, and the rule of law” (UN Security Council, 2012b), and does not discriminate against national, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural identities (UN Department of Public Information [UNDoPI], 2016). Second, that the conditions on the ground be made conducive to the facilitation of a settlement, which can only be achieved through dialogue and negotiations. And third, that all parties reject terrorism and strongly oppose terrorist organisations (UN DoPI, 2016).

11 On 27 May 2016, for instance, the Council extended EU restrictive measures against the Syrian regime until 1 June 2017. The EU maintains that as long as repression continues it will continue enforcing sanctions.

12 Such as the reform of state institutions in accordance with good governance and disarming the armed groups in an effort to rebuild a strong and unified national army.

The rapid steps outlined in all the documents predominantly point to the main points agreed upon in the Geneva Communiqué of 2012. First, to stop the fighting and achieve a UN-supervised cessation of hostilities to restore a much-needed stability; second, to engage parties in negotiations with the goal of reaching a settlement; third, to guarantee the timely provision of humanitarian assistance to locations where it is needed by allowing humanitarian agencies safe passage; fourth, to broaden the scale of release of arbitrarily detained persons and political prisoners; fifth, to ensure freedom of movement throughout the country for journalists; and sixth, to respect the people's human right to peacefully demonstrate (UN Security Council, 2012b).

Finally, the transition – dubbed the “mother of all issues” by the UN Special Envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura – was described by the Communiqué, UN Security Council Resolution 2254, and HNC's roadmap as the resultant political process of a settlement whereby a transitional governing body with full executive powers would review the constitutional order and guide the country to free and fair elections by June 2017 (UN Security Council, 2015). The HNC further broke down the transition into three phases, where a first phase of six months long negotiations on the basis of the Geneva Communiqué, UN Security Council Resolutions 2118<sup>13</sup> and 2254 is concluded; a second phase sees an inclusive constitutional framework, final cessation of hostilities, and departure of President Bashar al-Assad and his regime; and a third phase conducts UN-supervised elections under the new-found political and legal structure (High Negotiations Commission, 2016).

In the 3-phases transition envisaged in the UNSCR 2254, transitional justice<sup>14</sup> is a sine qua non of the future of Syria. It should encompass truth about the conduct of perpetrators and experiences of victims and provide mechanisms (a truth and reconciliation commission) that help regain faith in state institutions alongside the restoration of trust among citizens of various affiliations. Equally significant is the provision of social repair (healing) for victims and society for the violence, repression and authoritarianism (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2012). The transitional justice phase in post-conflict Syria nonetheless faces the daunting task of pressing needs such as a divided society with sectarian and regional tensions, immediacy of the public outcry for accountability and justice alongside an insufficient resource threshold to effectively implement it. This situation is a direct result of the conflict. Post-conflict Syria will additionally deal with the issue of compromised legitimacy and credibility of its institutions (Heydemann, 2013).

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13 Resolution 2118 was adopted by the Security Council on 27 September 2013 in the Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons. The resolution supervised the destruction of the al-Assad regime's chemical weapons arsenal (UN Security Council, 2013).

14 Transitional justice encompasses the set of judicial and non-judicial measures that are implemented in order to redress the legacies of massive human rights abuses, which may include criminal prosecutions, truth commissions, reparation programmes and various kinds of institutional reforms. It is not a special kind of justice but an approach to achieve justice in times of transitions from conflict by trying to achieve accountability and addressing victims' rights and promoting civic trust, which inextricably strengthens democratic rule of law (International Center for Transitional Justice [ICTJ]).

The success of previous transitional justice mechanisms have strongly hinged on safeguarding records and documentation. The identification of critical infrastructure sites and records that will assist legal committees to review existing laws in guiding this process should be orchestrated. In this regard, a preparatory committee is expected to begin carving out an action plan to ensure proper safeguarding of records and documentation. The transitional justice phase should also have an added feature: the creation of programmes to raise awareness of mechanisms in place to address victims' concerns without reprisal attacks (Syria Justice and Accountability Center, 2013). This phase will require international support, especially in the training of personnel who will be engaged in transitional justice mechanisms alongside the creation of appropriate networks of coordination of justice mechanisms.

Reconciliation in post-conflict Syria is another indispensable element. Effectively, the future of Syria depends on its ability to overcome the past (Charney, 2015). The incorporation of negotiations and dialogue could help as a disincentive against mass persecutions of former state officials. The Syrian post-conflict citizenry would also deal with the concept of relearning how to trust governmental institutions. The first "victims" of any transitional process are the police and security forces, parliament, media and ruling party officials (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2012). Subsequently, the rule of law needs to be re-established or in some circumstance strengthened. Thus, a capable transitional justice phase cannot do without the identification of trustworthy justice sector personnel to lead the transition in alignment with the rule of law.

The transitional justice phase should additionally incorporate mechanisms at an early stage to address economic violence for victims. Transitional justice is normally oriented towards the political dispensation. However, with over 6.6 million<sup>15</sup> Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who have lost direct access to their economic livelihoods, the introduction of economic justice at an early stage will ensure that the potential of victims falling prey to militias and radicalism is largely reduced if not halted holistically. However, one should admit that, under the current conditions prevailing in Syria, transitional justice is highly likely to remain a challenge to be faced in the not so near future.

## Transitional Period and Constitutional Challenges

The transitional period is ostensibly prior to the final holding of democratic and multi-party elections in post-conflict Syria. A key retrogressive determinant for the transitional period has been setting President Bashar al-Assad's departure as a precondition for the

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<sup>15</sup> It is estimated that at least 6.6 million people are internally displaced inside Syria, with over 1.3 million displaced in 2015 alone (UNOCHA, 2015).

peace talks. Nonetheless, in all outcomes that may arise, the HNC, the Syrian Democratic Council and the International Support Group are crucial in the negotiation processes, together with public figures and officials in forming a transitional government. If Syria ever reaches that stage, the onus of the interim government lies in ensuring that all of the requirements for a transition are met. The transitional government would therefore concern itself with drafting and ratifying a new democratic constitution, formulating new laws for elections and political parties and also ensuring that all media outlets and civil society associations are free to pursue their missions.

With the proviso that a transitional government will be formed based on consensus among the opposition groups, a negotiated settlement presents the best pathway for an effective transitional period. A negotiated settlement would be a strong political deterrent to al-Qaeda, ISIS and other terrorist groups as it would present a unanimous and containment platform to counteract their efforts. A negotiated settlement will be bedevilled by issues of fair distribution of oil revenue among different sectarian groups, repatriation and reparations. It will need the efforts of Gulf Arab states to ensure Syrian national stability.

On the duration of the transitional period, the HNC has outlined an ideal three-phase process, namely: first phase, a six-month negotiation process that reflects the Geneva Communiqué; second phase, a year and half of transitional government; and third phase, to include final constitutional revision and multi-party elections. The timelines should be flexible in order not to create unnecessary tensions and abuse transitional powers. For instance, the 18 month timeline might be too short to factor in Security Sector Reforms, especially Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR). However, the major challenge of the transitional period would be the drafting of a new constitution for Syria or amending the existing one to cope with the new political realities on the ground.

Past studies have revealed that there could be an amendment to the 2012 Constitution and existing laws (The Carter Center, 2015). In terms of amendment, there should be a curtailment of the powers of the Syrian president and the introduction of effective separation of powers between the branches of government. It is envisaged that for a fully-fledged transitional government, the amended constitution would confer powers on it accordingly. Only then can the process of judicial reform, governmental security reform and legislation pertaining to media, elections and political parties commence.

There could also be the complete overhaul of the current Syrian constitution in favour of an agreed upon new Interim Governing Constitution (IGC) (The Carter Center, 2015).



The agreements on a new IGC would serve as the fundamental principles during the transitional period to establish oversight mechanisms, safeguard rights and freedoms, ensure independence of the judiciary, facilitate a national dialogue and provide multi-party elections. A new constitution should also address the issue of minorities in Syria at its very inception. This will reduce the risks of sectarian strife. To this end, the constitution must emerge from an inclusive national dialogue that accommodates the needs and interests of Syria's diverse society. The steps that reinforce the position of an IGC should include: a transitional legal framework with fundamental rights and freedoms, transitional governance provisions as well as a roadmap for negotiating and drafting the permanent constitution. The constitution should be negotiated, drafted and approved by a Constitutional Assembly with additional consideration for the utilisation of a national referendum for final ratification, citing the Tunisian example.<sup>16</sup> The Constitutional Assembly, needless to say, should be as inclusive and representative as possible. Decisions by constitution-making officials should be rendered transparent and achieved by consensus, if possible.

Assuming that transitional phase is initiated, elections will be the "end of period goal". While free and fair multi-party elections are envisaged, Syrian opposition groups are expected to put forth formidable coalition parties that are capable of competing and winning the elections. Needless to say, fragmentations of the opposition groups make their contention for future political seats cumbersome assuming that the Baath party will not be detached from state institutions or barred from running.

## Possible Scenarios for Future Political Settlement of Syria

Inasmuch as there is growing consensus on the inevitability of multi-party elections, the type of government "power distribution" that will spring forth is the main issue that has seen varied debates. Both the "horizontal and vertical power distribution"<sup>17</sup> mechanisms have been considered as possible scenarios for the future of Syria.

Federalism has not so far emerged in the negotiations between the parties. However, there seems to be a wide scale consensus on the principle of administrative decentralisation in managing countries' affairs. HNC's Executive Framework for a Political Solution as presented in September 2016, pledges in Article 8 of General Principles, "giving the people of each governorate and district a role in managing their local affairs." Moreover, the same document recognises "the Kurdish cause" and promises action "to ensure their ethnic, linguistic and cultural rights" (Article 6). Yet all these rights and local

<sup>16</sup> The US Department of State opined their satisfaction that Tunisia's National Constituent Assembly voted to ratify Tunisia's new constitution on 26 January (US Department of State, 2014).

<sup>17</sup> The horizontal distribution of responsibilities defines relations between the executive, legislature and judiciary. The vertical separation of powers involves national and sub-national arrangements, decentralising authority to the regions so they become stakeholders in the country's governance. Both are a form of checks and balances (Phillips, 2016).

autonomy will be provided “within the framework of unity of the state and the people” (Article 8). Local councils as grassroots organisations, on the other hand, effectively representing the democratic participatory principle even now in Syria, are also envisaged as having an extensive role in the future of Syria (Article 50). Their roles as articulated in Article 51 of the Executive Framework cover planning, industry, agriculture, economy, commerce, education, etc., but not security in any manner.

There is no mention and/or indication of federalism in the UN Special Envoy’s Paper on Points of Commonalities either. The only exception is the Social Contract of the Rojava of Northern Syria. Even though it is called Social Contract of Rojava, it possesses undertones of secessionist indications. Despite its questionable democratic credentials, it is essentially ready-made material that could be invoked should any aspiration of self-determination materialise. Of intrinsic value is the fact that, apart from the “social contract”, all other deliberations pertaining to the future of Syria are geared towards a unified state with the recognition of Syria as a sovereign state as well as the protection of its territorial integrity.

In line with the proposition of a unified post-conflict Syria, there should be an incorporation of huge levels of decentralisation and reinforcement of the local government apparatus. Moreover, sectarian and ethnic communities should get political representation at the central level. In this instance, even though a bicameral system could be a solution, the Russian proposal to appoint government members on religious or ethnic affiliations would rather foment divisions, thus sowing the seeds for political gridlock. An upper house could be tasked to check the prevention of discrimination. The executive level should, however, have no allocation of official positions based on sectarian or ethnic inclinations (Yazigi, 2016). Furthermore, the same upper house called Constituent Assembly in the draft Syrian constitution distributed in January 2017 has some vague features, which may be interpreted as providing room for federation (see Article 40).

Owing to the centralised nature of pre-war Syria, the country is in dire need of decentralisation and a new governance structure. A de facto decentralisation has been seen as a result of fragmentation within the country and separation of many regions from central government control. Significantly, local authorities were birthed in these regions to ensure the delivery of primary services such as water and electricity for the population with some even initiating Sharia courts. However, these decentralisations were chaotic and irregular, and were run and financed by warlords from forced taxes and extortions and smuggled money in addition to funds from external supporters. Currently, only 50% of Syrian territory, equalling about 15 million people (65%), is under the regime’s control (The Syrian Constitution Bureau for Development and Investment, 2016).

In advocating a better governance structure for post-conflict Syria, an all-inclusive decentralisation that covers political, administrative and fiscal aspects enhances participatory governance, better service delivery and the attainment of balanced development could be an adequate scenario. Decentralisation should promote local council participation and also ensure that the voices of local people are heard in the development and reconstruction process, and that vital services reach damaged areas as envisaged in the HNC's Executive Framework. This notwithstanding, decentralisation faces the cumbersome task of the rise of warlords in rebel areas, the anxiety of local political and social feuds and the combination of internally and externally displaced people, the global fight against ISIS and cleavages existing within the regional as well as global powers. Syria is at the intersection of all these local challenges and geopolitical confrontations.

## Conclusions

Any political settlement and subsequent transitional government that is birthed will have to deal with the fact that Syria will remain fragile for a considerable period. The country has already lost six years of modern history and over 40 years of social and economic development.<sup>18</sup> Immediate obstacles faced by the transitional government pursuant to a political settlement will be on-going insecurity hampering progress, the cost of addressing humanitarian needs, reconstruction and redevelopment, sanctions and lack of public funds, and lack of qualified personnel coupled with a distrustful population. It will also need to address the contending expectations of neighbouring countries.

Extremists, militias and warlords expanded and consolidated their power, exploiting the political vacuum in Syria. However, the conflict has also contributed to generating activism: a crop of local leaders has emerged as a reaction to authoritarian governance and conflict limitations. Hitherto, civil societies in Syria only restricted themselves to charitable and religious causes called "moujtamaa ahli". But the new wave of civil society activism is impeded by structural deficiencies and limited capacity, a direct result of Baathist policies that prevented their offshoot in the Damascus spring (Khalaf, 2016). As such, a political settlement will do well in paving the way for the sustenance of the new resurgence in civil society activism. Civil society groups present one of the direct ways of grassroots engagement and dialogue, local participation and consensus building.

The military and security apparatus would also need a holistic assessment and reform. Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) will be key in state-building in post-conflict Syria. This will require a commitment by stakeholders that there should be

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18 War in Syria has robbed it of 40 years of social and economic development, Abdullah Dardari, Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia ("The Middle East: From Violence to Conflict", 2016).

no forceful solution. A political settlement will also provide a platform for consideration of the capacities in which foreign assistance will be needed, including withdrawal of forces. Urgent post-settlement issues will include the provision of relief to victims and society at large and the restoration of the Syrian economy and social services, such as food, medicine, shelter, water and energy. There will also be an urgent need for the preparation of a transitional security force and preliminary vetting to determine trustworthy individuals to take leadership positions.

A post-conflict government structure for the future of Syria is a very cumbersome task. The fragmentation within the Syrian opposition both inside and outside of Syria after forty-eight years of single-family rule is hard to ignore. The political vacuum in Syria has become so widened that a divided Syrian opposition will complicate the task of reaching a consensus with regards to matters pertaining to leadership, building a common vision and political representation. As evidenced in this research, a post-conflict Syria will have to rework its legal structure, constitution and electoral system.

Notwithstanding the above, parties involved in negotiating a political settlement should make a concerted effort. This presents the best platform upon which the transitional period could be launched. The duration of the conflict will also have a significant impact on the type of political structure that emerges. Adopting a broad-based and inclusive approach, focused on a Syrian-led transition process under international supervision with the assistance of key third countries, will prepare a pathway for post-conflict multi-party democracy.

The transitional period cannot and will not address all long-term complexities regarding the nature of the future of Syrian governance and Syrian society but will launch the necessary platform and blueprint. Moreover, attempting to address a new constitutional framework, transitional justice and reconstruction altogether may overload the process given the tasks at hand. However, what is projected for the future of Syria is a unified country where there is greater pedigree of decentralisation. Decentralisation should be implemented and communities recognised as political actors with a larger degree of local governance. The central state would nonetheless maintain essential characteristics such as defence, foreign affairs and treasury. This together with an all-inclusive political settlement will lay the grounds for “Syria’s day after”, irrespective of the consequences of a political settlement on regional and international stakeholders.

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## **The Syrian Military: The Day After**

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## Introduction

The Syrian armed forces have played – and still play – a prominent role in the onset and evolution of its country’s conflict. As the main military actor on the ground, it has been accused of having caused 90% of the civilian victims (more than 400,000 at the time of writing), using chemical weapons and other war crimes. The conflict has also taken a toll on the institution: 60,000 soldiers have lost their lives and several thousand have deserted, including high-ranking officers, not to mention the loss of equipment and damage to military infrastructure. The once 300,000-strong Syrian military probably now stands at a maximum of 150,000-175,000 troops (“About 430 Thousands Were Killed”, 2016; Davison, 2016).

But precisely because civil wars are to a significant extent a security issue (even though they begin as a political one), any type of post-conflict scenario will involve the armed forces in one way or another. No peace settlement, regardless of its outlines, will hold without security provisions in place. Almost absurdly, the very same institution that contributed to the war is also one of the key actors to rely on once the conflict is over – an irony that applies not only to Syria but to most post-civil war countries, and presents a notoriously difficult circle to square.

Unsurprisingly, different actors involved in the Syrian conflict have expressed different ideas and preferences regarding the military’s future once fighting ceases. It is perhaps worth noting that most international proposals mark the beginning of the conflict’s end as the retreat of the Syrian military from cities and residential areas and into its barracks – given that several military units are stationed in cities, it is not clear how this would work out in practice (League of Arab States, 2011; League of Arab States, 2012; “Kofi Annan’s Six-Point Plan”, 2012).

There are at this point broadly three sets of proposals regarding the Syrian armed forces in a post-conflict scenario. The opposition’s vision, laid out in several documents since 2011, includes the creation of an interim Joint Military Council that would supervise the immediate aftermath of the conflict’s end. The council, made up of militia fighters, defected military personnel as well as vetted army officers “whose hands have not been stained with Syrian blood” would coordinate security activities (including collecting arms, monitoring the ceasefire, managing and protecting borders, combating terrorism) and supervise the restructuring of a new military force that would, in the medium to long term, integrate former militia fighters (“Cairo Documents: Joint Political Vision”, 2012; High Negotiations Commission, 2016). The proposal remains otherwise silent on the details of the restructuring of the military, or indeed on the mechanisms for civil-military relations.

The second set of proposals, put forward by the United Nations (UN), is comparatively vague. Although in agreement with the opposition's general ideas on disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) as well as re-creation of a "strong and unified national army" in charge of border security, the fight against terrorism and the monopoly of violence, it spells out no details beyond these broad guidelines. Special Envoy De Mistura instead suggested the establishment of a thematic negotiations committee that would define the outlines of the post-conflict Syrian military in 2015, and later the "identification of standards for a unified, national, professional army as well as for the disarmament, demobilisation and re-integration of armed groups" (UN, 2012; UN, 2015; UN, 2016a, UN, 2016b).

While the Syrian government has issued no statement concerning the armed forces' role in a post-conflict situation, Russia's proposals have been less concerned with change and more with status quo. A first Russian paper suggested that the functions of commander-in-chief of the armed forces and control of special services will be retained by the elected Syrian president, an element that was also included in a Russian proposal for a Syrian constitution. A Russian memorandum of intent issued a year later included a new provision only insofar as it recognised Kurdish paramilitary units as legitimate military forces in the Kurdish-held region – a proposition rejected by the Syrian government ("Text of Russia's Draft Proposals", 2015; Abboud, 2016).

Beyond these rather broad sketches, parties to the conflict have not put forward more comprehensive plans for the Syrian military's reconstruction – in part, of course, because said reconstruction will depend very much on the conditions of the conflict's end, the presence or absence of other troops (such as an international stabilisation force) and the security situation at this point in time. Nevertheless, concrete plans for Syrian post-conflict security are necessary to ensure smooth transition no matter the exact circumstances of peace.

This paper looks first at the particular challenges of post-conflict security and situates them in the Syrian conflict; it then assesses those features of the Syrian armed forces that will be relevant for the post-conflict context. From this, the study extrapolates three scenarios and uses them as frameworks for different plans for the Syrian military's reconstruction.

## Post-Conflict Security Challenges

Although human conflicts are at the heart of political contests, once they have evolved into war their security dimension takes precedence. The first sector to be at the forefront



of a civil war is consequently the security sector and all its components, be they military, internal security or related civilian institutions.

Once the conflict is over, this sector is not only highly politicised and fragmented, it is also bloated, deregulated and usually lacks sound civilian supervision. Nevertheless, it is precisely this sector that the post-conflict peace hinges on: only where security prevails after a conflict can economic activity, reconstruction efforts and of course political normalisation occur. Hence, post-conflict security sectors face two principal challenges: re-organising a highly disjointed sector, while maintaining security in an equally highly volatile and violent environment. It is worth noting that there are very few cases where states succeeded in achieving both without any outside assistance. The reliance on security at a time when security is out of control is one of the main reasons why civil conflicts have the highest relapse rate of all conflicts at 50%. 90% of civil wars in the 21st century occurred in countries that had seen a civil war in the previous 30 years (Collier, Hoeffler & Soderbom, 2008). Stabilising the security sector after an internal conflict is consequently one of the most important, but also the most challenging tasks.

The armed forces are usually at the centre of this task because they are not only normally better armed than their civilian colleagues and trained for much more elevated levels of violence but they retain a high degree of centralised decision-making, making them capable of moving in much more difficult circumstances than the police. This also explains why the military is more often involved in civil wars than the internal security forces.

Post-civil war security sectors share a number of challenging features regardless how the conflict comes to an end.

Firstly, civil wars – as the name suggests – lead to a militarisation of civil society, both directly and indirectly. This begins with the normalisation of violence as a means to solve conflict, extends to the prevalence of arms amongst the civilian population up to the existence of (comparatively harmless) armed self-defence entities and, of course, heavily armed militias with a political and/or economic agenda. In this context, the monopoly of violence is no longer controlled by the state – with tangible implications. Where the state no longer controls the means and regulation of violence, its core function as a provider of security and order is undermined, and with it its legitimacy writ large. Armed groups profit from this security vacuum for both political and economic purposes: while they pose as a credible alternative to the existing political order because they provide security, they also control resource extraction as well as taxation of imports and exports. As a result, the proliferation of weapons during a civil war undermines not only the state's

authority but also other traditional sources of authority, be it tribes, clans or religious groups (Ayoob, 1995, p. 172). Once the conflict has formally ended, reversing this militarisation requires time and resources – both elements that post-conflict states usually lack.

One of the first measures post-conflict states seek to implement in this context is disarmament. This achieves two effects: it removes the means with which the conflict was fought and thereby reduces the relapse likelihood, and it creates a stable security environment conducive to political stabilisation and dialogue between former combatants. However, in order for it to be successful, it requires trust in the peace agreement. Where civilians and former combatants have doubts about the sustainability of the agreement, they will retain their weapons. Sadly, mistrust is one of the main features of most post-conflict environments. Worse, where disarmament programmes are not properly implemented, they achieve exactly the opposite and increase mistrust. Disarmament programmes in Angola or Libya failed for two reasons: the necessary level of trust was not in place, and no adequate verification process had been established for their implementation.

Although the magnitude of weapons in civilian hands in Syria is not clear, disarmament will be an issue (De Groof, 2013). Opposition forces have captured weapons, including heavy ones, from government arsenals or received them from different sources; but the regime equally has armed militias in its support. There are two issues with the disarmament programmes put forward for Syria: they do not include a verification process, and they relegate the task to the armed actors (including the armed forces) under the supervision of the Joint Military Council. This is problematic mainly because it assumes an unlikely level of trust, and has no provisions in place to ensure trust in the disarmament process.

Generally, disarmament programmes are severely hampered in their efficiency if they are not flanked by a regional arms embargo. Given the porous nature of borders, especially in the Middle East, weapons can be easily replaced after they have been handed in. By the same token, peace settlements which allow for the continuous possession of weapons by armed groups are built on shaky ground and conflict can easily be re-triggered under those circumstances. In addition, disarmament programmes need to take into account the prevalent “gun culture” in a country. This appears to be less of a problem in Syria which, somewhat in contrast to its neighbours Iraq and Lebanon, had a significantly lower private gun ownership rate of 3.91 per 100 citizens before the conflict (735,000 weapons for 22 million inhabitants). However, the longer a conflict lasts, the more this is likely to change. In general, disarmament programmes have a higher success

rate if they focus on heavy weaponry such as tanks, surface-to-air-missiles and rocket launchers, and establish rules for the display and carrying of small arms in public.

Secondly – and more importantly – demobilisation of combatants is an important feature in the demilitarisation of society. While demobilisation is the formal disbandment of armed formations, the subsequent reintegration into society is the ultimate criterion of success for the process. Since membership in an armed group provides fighters with status, purpose and income, it is important to replace these elements; otherwise they can turn into spoilers. But where combatants are successfully reintegrated into society, their links to former fighting units are broken, and an alternative source of income is provided. Reintegration is particularly challenging in modern economies, where the gap between combatant skill and labour market demands is important; but even agricultural societies – such as Syria – face difficulties in the integration of former fighters although it should technically be easier. Agriculture does not provide the element of status fighters often yearn for, and their prolonged absence from home due to the conflict often hinders their access to land.

The number of fighters concerned by DDR programmes in Syria is difficult to estimate at this point; there are over 120 different groups in Syria fighting today, with 60,000-70,000 said to be “moderate”; an additional 20,000 are in Ahrar al-Sham (al-Qaeda outlet Jabhat Fatah Al-Sham is excluded from the calculation as is the Islamic State as it is assumed that they will not benefit from reintegration measures) (MacAskill, 2011). The Syrian military, should it be disbanded (an option not put forward by any of the parties involved) has around 100,000 men at the time of writing, but DDR measures would be required for its deserted personnel of 60,000 as well. Perhaps most worryingly, no proposal put forward includes any references to demobilisation. Although integration into the armed forces is mentioned in the opposition’s framework, there are limits to how many former militiamen a military institution can absorb without running the risk of disintegration.

Crucially, neither disarmament nor demobilisation can take place without a minimum level of security: without it, combatants will not hand in their weapons and demobilise – but their continued existence as armed formations in itself presents a threat to security.

At the governmental end, post-civil war forces also share a certain number of features. Any armed force engaged in prolonged conflict will suffer from low morale, cohesion and lack of adequate resources; in addition, however, the institution’s oversight mechanisms – whether military or civilian ones – are likely to have been suspended, especially if the

institution operates outside a democratic context. This in turn will have facilitated human rights abuses – if not encouraged by the regime – and hence burden the relationship the population will have with the armed forces. Most importantly, however, most military forces engaged in civil war will emerge as a party to the conflict and hence as a politicised actor rather than a neutral security provider. This is the case in Syria as well.

Lastly, security in post-conflict societies is further weakened by the side-effects of war: porous borders, criminal networks, terrorism and high crime rates all contribute to instability and jeopardise a usually fragile peace agreement further. All aspects of security – ranging from petty crime to large-scale physical destruction – are consequently severely challenged after a conflict – and will have to be managed urgently by an institution itself severely challenged, as the armed forces are usually in the lead in all of these matters right after a conflict.

## The Syrian Military: Institutional Features

No matter the outline of the post-conflict context, the Syrian military's institutional features will play a role in the aftermath of the war. It is on these that the armed forces will be rebuilt, and it is these that will shape its popular perception and indeed self-perception. Military institutions are by nature highly historical and self-referential, even if they have been disbanded and subsequently rebuilt, such as the Iraqi or the German ones. Institutional memory survives not only in the individuals that make up the force, but also in doctrine, training, and of course infrastructure and weaponry.

Perhaps the most important feature of the Syrian military for the post-conflict setting is its highly politicised nature. Of all military forces in the Arab world, Syria's was by far the most involved in politics: between 1949 and 1982, it staged 17 coup attempts, 13 of which succeeded in toppling the government. Even the once very political Iraqi armed forces come a distant second with "only" 11 coup attempts of which more than half failed (Torrey, 1964, p. 121). Military intervention became not only the quickest but also easiest way to attain power in Syria – one of the reasons calls for a coup to remove Bashar al-Assad were pondered by the opposition ("Kamal al-Labwani: Al-Assad's ouster", 2013; "The Opposition Ponders Launching an Appeal", 2013). Although very involved in politics in the first three decades of Syrian independence, the armed forces were however not a political actor in their own right. Whenever they did act politically, they did so in collusion with civilians seeking to take advantage of their military power. Since the arrival of his father, Hafez al-Assad, who came to power in 1970, the armed forces have, however, been intertwined with the regime's

power structure, most notably the Baath party. Although at least three coup attempts occurred during his time in power, the Syrian military morphed into a more professional, better equipped but tightly controlled agent of the regime.

To achieve both the protection of the military as an institution and his own regime, Hafez al-Assad relied on a combination of traditional coup-proofing techniques – but implemented in a constructive rather than destructive manner. These were mechanisms to gloss over the Syrian military’s increasingly ethnic factor, the creation of parallel forces, the appointments of loyal officers to strategic posts as well as the doling out of benefits to the officer corps. Taken together, these measures created the illusion of a united, cohesive and national force – in reality, however, the Syrian armed forces were the result of two intertwined militaries in one. What remained unchanged, however, was the traditional infusion and control of the Syrian military by the civilian politicians – which was brought to a test with the Syrian civil war.

The second aspect is the Syrian military’s handling of its plural nature. Since the coup of 1963, particularly the Alawite minority played an increasingly important role in the armed forces (of the five founding members of the military committee, three were Alawites and two were from the Ismaili sect). Until then, neither Syrian politics nor the military had been ruled by primarily ethnic or religious considerations. Yet several dynamics had unlocked the sectarian genie from the bottle: firstly, political inclinations somewhat overlapped with ethno-religious affiliation, which played to the advantage of the more cohesive Alawite community. Small (10-20% of the population), disenfranchised, rural, the Alawites very much sympathised with the socialist tone of Baathism, whereas Sunnis were, as a larger community, more diverse and consequently took to different political streams. Consequently, in the military, “Sunnis of one persuasion ended up purging Sunnis of another persuasion, or low or middle class Sunnis joined Alawites or Druzes in purging upper class Sunnis, or rural-oriented Sunnis joined with Alawites and Druzes in purging city-based Sunnis. In political terms, the Secessionists, the Huranists, the Nasserists, the group of the independent Ziyad Hariri, and the supporters of the Baathist Amin al-Hafez were successively purged between March 1963 and February 1966, and, with every purge, the Sunnis in the officer corps decreased in significance” (Batatu, 1981, p. 343). Before 1963, Alawites were not concentrated in the officer corps but in the non-commissioned officers as well as the rank and file, but they survived the purges better than their Sunni counterparts.

Secondly, the constant political bickering of the 1950s within the armed forces led to mistrust, a breakdown of military procedures and hence to a breakdown of

professionalism. Command structures, promotions, recruitments and appointments all relied increasingly on shared identities. Rather than sectarianism leading to political turmoil it was the other way around (Drysdale, 1979). In addition, Alawites had incidentally ended up strategically in units relevant to striking a coup, such as the air squadrons, the armoured brigades around the capital as well as intelligence forces.

To the Baath regime, its overly Alawite nature was a disadvantage. It needed the support of all of Syria's population to stay in power, and as such tone down the notion of sectarianism. This was even more so the case when it came to the military: not only was an all-Alawite force numerically simply not feasible and Sunni troops therefore necessary, the symbolism of the armed forces mattered to the regime and its legitimacy. It consequently pursued a policy of "glossing over" the Alawite factor in the armed forces. While the officer corps was purged of non-Baathist officers, which were quickly replaced with Baathist (and often Alawite) supporters, crucial and visible roles were given to Sunnis or other minorities. Of Syria's ten defence ministers since the 1966 coup, six were Sunnis, one Greek Orthodox and three Alawites – more importantly, in the first three decades of the regime, the chief of staff was always a Sunni, flanked by Mustafa Tlas, who served for 28 years as minister of defence, also a Sunni. Sunni officer grievances nevertheless prevailed and were real – yet they were voiced in military professional not sectarian terms (Bou Nassif, 2015).

But while the regime was busy clouding its somewhat lopsided recruitment into the armed forces, it ensured that strategic positions in the armed forces were manned with loyal men, whether Alawite or Sunni. Although al-Assad recognised the detrimental impact of politics on the armed forces, this did not imply depoliticisation: instead, it meant Baathification. The corps, while revamped and refocused on meritocratic principles, was at the same time purged from political opposition (Perlmutter, 1969). While giving the officer corps at least the illusion of diversity mattered, 90% of general officers were, at the time of Hafez al-Assad's death in 2000, trusted Alawites – often tied personally to the president (Pollack, 2002, pp. 479- 480).

It is important to note that the regime succeeded, in spite of an Alawite overhang in the officer corps, to largely shield its troops from sectarianism. This was facilitated by the creation of parallel forces. The "Defence Companies" under al-Assad's brother Rifat's command, later replaced by the Republican Guard Division and the Special Forces under Bashar al-Assad's brother Maher, are not only predominantly staffed with Alawites, their goal is to protect the regime. This freed up the armed forces for their actual business of war, and allowed it to maintain a more diverse manpower as well as cohesiveness.

The fact that sectarian aspects did not play into the desertions witnessed since 2011 is a testimony to this: low-ranking Sunni soldiers who had deserted stated very clearly that their motivation to leave was of humanitarian concern, and stressed that religion did not play a significant role in the armed forces. Similarly, desertions have also occurred from the Alawite community – the most notable one former chief of staff and defence minister Ali Habib Mahmud (Ohl, Albrecht & Koehler, 2015). The ongoing conflict is, however, likely to reverse this trend and lead to a re-sectarianisation of the Syrian military.

Thirdly, officers of the Syrian armed forces – who received notoriously low salaries of between \$400 and \$800 a month – were also members of the country's economic upper class. Not only did they receive privileged housing and access to luxury cars, they were also allowed to use their positions for enrichment in a variety of ways. Syrians who dodged their military service bribed the officer of the unit in question; within their military sector, officers were allowed to rule as in a personal fiefdom. Corruption, nepotism and patronage networks became a tool to tie the officers directly to the regime – it is also what hollowed it out in terms of military professionalism, but not to the point where it broke cohesion (Khaddour, 2015; Khaddour, 2016). This expectation is likely to remain with any new officer corps, in the same way as Iraqi officers imported their corrupt practices from the 1990s in the post-Saddam military.

Interestingly, the transition from Hafez to Bashar al-Assad in 2000 brought no to little change in the relationship between regime and military although Bashar did not have the same military pedigree as his father (Zisser, 2001).

## The Impact of the War

When the Syrian civil war erupted in 2011, the armed forces and their cohesiveness and fighting power were put to the test. While numerous predictions foresaw immediate collapse, the military was still fighting at the time of writing, five years into the conflict ("Cracks in the Army", 2011). It was consequently still very much intertwined with the regime rather than a potential independent actor capable of ousting it ("Syrian Opposition Ponders Appealing to Army", 2013; "Syrian Dissident Urges Army to Overthrow al-Assad", 2013). While this is in part the result of the pre-war policies of both Bashar and Hafez al-Assad, the regime has handled the conflict in such a way as to protect the armed forces as its ultimate legitimacy-giver. Should the Syrian military collapse, so would the regime's claim as the legitimate government.

It has done so in several ways: it has bolstered its depleted ranks with militias and foreign forces, increased the salaries of the troops, hailed the army in virtually every speech, employed a nationalist narrative and relied on politicised tactics.

Desertion has certainly halved the Syrian military in the years since the war started – a fact even Bashar al-Assad openly recognised in summer 2015 when he mentioned a “lack of human resources” in the military (“Assad: Syrian Army Fatigued”, 2015; “The Regime’s Military Capabilities”, 2015). By the end of 2011, 3,000 Sunni officers were said to have deserted from all ranks. Crucially, however, these officers never defected with their whole units, and since they were not in critical positions, their departure did not affect the effectiveness of the military as a whole. The strategy of loyal appointments to critical posts thus paid off in this situation. Since 2014, desertions have come to a near halt.

Since the beginning of the conflict, the regime has employed several techniques to refill these empty posts: it has prolonged active service members (the so-called class of 102), granted amnesties to avoiders of military service and deserters that have not joined the ranks of the opposition and recalled retirees. Its most efficient way, however, was the creation of localised militias as well as the help of foreign forces such as Hezbollah, which are particularly of use in infantry operations. This leaves the Syrian military with mostly artillery and air power operations, potentially shielding it from further desertion.

At the same time, the regime repeatedly increased military salaries – with, however, little effect as inflation in Syria has been rampant since the war. In 2011, every civil servant received a one-time raise of 1,500 Syrian pounds (around \$32 at the time), a 30% salary increase for every employee earning less than 10,000 Syrian pounds a month and a 20% increase for those earning more than 10,000. It increased salaries further in 2013 by 40% on the first 10,000 Syrian pounds earned and 20% on the second, and increased pensions for military personnel. In early 2015, it awarded a one-time payment of 4,000 Syrian pounds (around \$15) to all salaries, and announced further increases in October 2015 (“Syria to Raise Army Salaries”, 2015).

The place Bashar al-Assad allocates to the armed forces in the numerous speeches he has given since the war erupted should not be underestimated. While his first speech in January 2012 devoted barely two sentences to the armed forces (“Standing hand in hand with the country’s institutions, assisting these institutions and the army, and morally supporting the army!”) this changed as the conflict evolved. A year later, he adopted a



grander tone: “Greetings to those who deserve the biggest greetings: the men of the Syrian Arab Army. Greetings to our valiant officers, NCOs and soldiers (...) who are exerting sweat and blood for the sake of Syria, which they see dearer than themselves and all that they possess. Greetings to our Armed Forces as they wage the fiercest of wars, determined to restore peace and security (...). Our Armed Forces, which have recorded acts of heroism through their cohesion, steadfastness, and national unity, were a reflection of the people’s steadfastness and cohesiveness. (...) Glory to every soldier who fell in the battle while defending the national soil. Glory, all glory, to every soldier who carries his arms and blood to continue the mission of those who fell.” Al-Assad, along with defence minister Fahd Jassem al-Frej, seized opportunities such as army day on 1 August to hail the military as the saviour of the “cultural identity of the Arab nation and Syria”, carrying the “pan-Arab responsibility on its shoulders for decades” as the true embodiment of Syria and patriotism. The longest tribute to the forces came in al-Assad’s speech of 2015, when he not only recognised desertion as a problem but also called on the Syrian people to support it more. “If we want the army to offer its best, we must offer the most we have for it. If we want it to operate at its maximum power, we must provide for it all the energy it needs (...) Defeat does not exist in the lexicon of the Syrian Arab Army.” (“Syrian President Condemns West”, 2012; “We Will Engage in Dialogue”, 2013; “Syria’s Al-Assad Salutes Army”, 2013; “Syrian Leader Gives Speech”, 2015). In 2016, the Syrian military was allowed to vote for the first time in parliamentary elections – another measure to appease an embattled force.

Of course, in spite of these measures, morale is low in the Syrian forces today. Over 60,000 soldiers have fallen in the conflict; in 2014, the Islamic State executed several hundred captured Syrian soldiers in Raqqa and Hasaka province. On social media, recruits regularly complain about conditions, low salaries, outdated equipment and forced conscription (“Syria Army Conscription”, 2015). Within the forces, mistrust is rampant – some analysts estimate that only 65,000 to 75,000 of its troops are actually reliable for offensives whereas the remnants are posted in defensive positions (“The Regime’s Military Capabilities”, 2015). Nevertheless, as a force, the Syrian military is still standing – as CIA Director Brennan noted: “Syria has a real army (...) a large conventional military force with tremendous firepower” (Slavin, 2014).

In sum, Syria’s post-war military will consequently be less sectarian in collective identity than might be assumed, with an Alawite majority at the highest officer levels, important combat experience, a highly political yet nationalist outlook, corrupt practices and, of course, high levels of fatigue.

## The Syrian Military after the War: Three Scenarios

The challenges of the Syrian armed forces and their reconstruction depend very much on the circumstances under which the conflict ends. The following scenarios sketch out the implications for the Syrian military in the absence of a foreign peacekeeping force, as for the moment there are no indications of such a presence.

### Scenario 1: The Syrian regime crushes the uprising

Contrary to some beliefs, a military victory by the Syrian regime would still entail all the security issues raised above. The demobilisation and disarmament of more than 80,000 opposition fighters would be an issue the Syrian government would have to manage – but in a coercive manner in the absence of a peace treaty. This means that the Syrian military – in the rather deplorable state it will be in after combat operations have ceased – would have to conduct search missions and forceful seizures of arms in the immediate aftermath of the conflict. In the absence of political reform or change, this is very likely to be met with significant resistance and result in further casualties on both sides – especially given the depleted and fatigued state of the Syrian military, whose legitimacy is not recognised by the opposition's forces. Studies show that for enforced disarmament to be successful, the military force conducting it must be able to project high levels of military capability – which the Syrian military is unlikely to project in its current state.

Where disarmament is not consensual, it is also highly likely to be incomplete – weapons would simply be hidden for further use. Cases of coercive disarmament conducted by United Nations peacekeeping forces, such as in Liberia, Somalia or Haiti, inevitably led to declined levels of acceptance (Tanner, 1996). In the case of Syria, this would mean that discontent with the regime would grow further, leading to renewed and, more importantly, protracted violence.

The difficulty in completely extinguishing an insurgency is showcased in Algeria. In numbers, Algeria's Islamist insurgency was at the absolute maximum half of Syria's uprising, while its population was nearly double that of Syria – still, it took the Algerian military more than a decade to reduce violence to near-acceptable levels. Nevertheless, Algeria still had high levels of terrorism for over a decade after the conflict came to an end, ranking 15th on the Global Terrorism Index. In 2011, it still counted 25 terrorist incidents. Given the smaller size of Syria, and the larger size of its insurgency, it is likely that Syria's violence would be longer and more protracted than Algeria's. In addition, the Syrian regime would have to manage the integration of its former enemy combatants; although victory rhetoric would suggest

punishment, the opposition's forces are simply too large to be either imprisoned or ignored as a potential security problem: former combatants who had not been reintegrated into society inevitably triggered renewed conflict in other cases.

The Syrian military, meanwhile, would face its own difficult reconstruction. Civil-military relations after a conflict are often strained, no matter the outcome of the war. In this “winner takes it all” scenario, the Syrian armed forces would feel emboldened and therefore would be even less likely to accept measures designed to recreate order, discipline and authority in a force largely free from oversight in the last years. Investigations into cases of disobedience, theft and corruption are likely to be met with resistance. In addition, the institution is likely to face budget cuts in the immediate aftermath of the conflict's end as the regime would have to divert resources to reconstruction. This would further fuel resentment in the troops who would expect, in this scenario, preferential treatment after the conflict. Lastly, the post-war Syrian military might, or might not, choose to reintegrate deserters. The regime has repeatedly announced pardoning returnee deserters and draft-dodgers over the past few years (“Assad Grants Pardons”, 2016; “Syrian President Grants Amnesty”, 2015; “Assad Offers Conditional Amnesty”, 2013). In addition to alleviating manpower shortages, this would send a message of reconciliation more generally. But for deserters to turn themselves in, they would have to trust the regime's word. The regime could also opt for the Nigerian solution: in the 1970s, Nigeria's military reintegrated only the officers, not the soldiers, who had joined the secessionists during the Biafra war with a penalty of delayed promotion and salary cuts.

## **Scenario 2: The opposition brings the regime to fall**

A scenario in which the Syrian regime falls would probably be flanked – if not triggered – by the collapse of the Syrian military as well. This would echo the Libyan scenario after 2011 and entail similar consequences.

Stockpiles would be unguarded and pillaged by civilians; weapons would flow freely in the country and be sold into other conflict theatres unless the opposition's forces take immediate provisions to guard them.

The over 100,000 self-demobilised soldiers and officers would, in the immediate aftermath, probably go into hiding for fear of reprisals and arrest. If collective punishment manifests itself – in the shape of lustration laws or other forms of political exclusion –, these troops are at high risk of organising violent opposition against the new political order and creating large-scale and protracted instability, as occurred in Iraq and Libya.

This could be prevented with the promise of reintegration into a new Syrian force following a transparent and depoliticised vetting process, perhaps conducted by a neutral third party. So far, most proposals by the opposition have indicated a preference for institutional continuity, but some have suggested a complete disbandment of the present Syrian military and the reconstruction of a new one (“The Day After Project”, 2012; “Syria Transition Roadmap”, 2013; Çakmak & Ustaoglu, 2015). In these proposals, security would be provided by unarmed citizens and the Syrian police until the armed forces are rebuilt – a force highly unlikely to be capable of dealing with the intricate security challenges of a post-conflict situation.

Although all proposals so far have called for a vetting process for current Syrian military personnel, the outlines of this process are not clear. It would be important for the new political order to vet individuals based on their behaviour rather than their group or party affiliation, for several reasons: large-scale purges reduce capacity, remove innocent individuals, create resentment against the new order in the process and are unlikely to achieve the goal of a reformed, sound institution (Office of the United Nations, 2006). But as vetting not only requires significant resources, it also takes a significant amount of time – which both post-conflict settings lack, having led in other comparable situations such as in Iraq and Libya to a preference for collective rather than individual lustration. Nevertheless, vetting is a less costly and speedier alternative to criminal prosecution, as is the exclusion from governmental jobs act as a punitive measure. In addition, the vetting process would have to spell out transparent criteria for exclusion as well as the procedures. In order to avoid the creation of peace spoilers, individuals must retain the impression that they are being excluded solely for their own wrongdoing rather than because of their affiliation with a political order. Perhaps crucially, a sense of certainty must be communicated to former service members. It is worth remembering that Libya’s opposition promised fair treatment to those defecting from the regime, only to introduce one of the most comprehensive lustration laws in a post-conflict setting two years later regardless of defection or indeed behaviour. Syrian military personnel are likely to remember this broken promise. It is also worth noting that not all of Syria’s military has been equally involved in the fighting. Vetting procedures could focus on those units most engaged in battle (e.g. the Defence Companies, the 4th Armoured Division, the Special Forces Regiments) (Holliday, 2013).

In this scenario, it would be important for the new political leadership to sequence the reform of the defence sector carefully. Overambitious reforms of military and adjacent institutions such as the defence ministry would have to be delayed to the benefit of assembly and vetting, as crisis contexts are very challenging for reform. Stability in the security sector would be more important than the hurried establishment of procedures and reformed

defence postures. Crucially, the merger of opposition and regime forces would have to be undertaken in a stable political environment. Merging former opponents is a difficult endeavour not so much for reasons of political animosity but of institutional rivalry. Similar mergers elsewhere have failed when former militia fighters insisted on integration as whole units. Disagreements between former militiamen and military professionals also arose over questions of rank, training and discipline. The best manner to integrate therefore consists of a small-unit approach flanked by strong political support for the process and high levels of professional standards for all troops involved (Licklider, 2014).

Meanwhile, security would have to be provided by the opposition forces. Ambitions to transform the opposition's forces into a standing military force, as voiced by some defected officers, are likely to be hampered by a number of issues ranging from lack of discipline to training and equipment. The transformation of such units into a regular force is of course feasible but requires a significant amount of time and, more importantly, stable security conditions unlikely to be in place in the aftermath of the conflict ("Syrian Opposition Member Interviewed", 2014; "The Opposition Activates the Formation", 2014).

As in Libya, these forces would have significant combat experience but none in matters of civilian security, ranging from counter-terrorism, border control, crime prevention and law enforcement. Security in this scenario would be likely to take a quick nosedive if these forces are not supervised and checked by a strong and legitimate civilian component. Revenge acts against supporters of the previous regime cannot be excluded in this scenario and would delegitimise the new political order.

### **Scenario 3: Opposition and regime come to a negotiated solution**

In this scenario, the conflict would come to an end through a comprehensive peace treaty – it would, however, still come with a substantial set of challenges. Peace agreements do not automatically lead to trust, rendering their immediate aftermath highly fragile and prone to relapse into conflict. Most decisions pertaining to the security sector will have to be taken jointly, requiring compromise and concessions not readily available in a post-conflict situation. While the agreement itself can build on provisions designed to prevent this, spoilers are still likely to attempt to destabilise the post-conflict context.

Both parties to the conflict could for instance agree on weapons limitation or demilitarised zones in order to prevent renewed fighting; they could agree on zones of separation of armed forces as well as mutually approved troop movements. Heavy weapons could be concentrated in a designated area, and both sides could agree to

comply with a ban on arms and ammunition imports. Disarmament programmes in this context are at high risk of being suspended due to mistrust and the ensuing security dilemma. The opposition will find disarming difficult if it does not trust the regime, and hence delay the process. This in turn might give the regime the pretext for suspending all other cooperation.

Once security is stabilised, both parties would have to agree on the demobilisation of the opposition forces and their integration into the national military institution, or Syria would de facto maintain several armed forces (such as was the case in Bosnia-Herzegovina until 2005). Here, too, levels of trust are required, which are usually not yet high enough right after the conflict has come to an end. The division of the post-conflict phase into an initiation and a consolidation phase could help delineate the conditions under which the next steps in security cooperation will take place.

Should both parties agree on an integration of the former militiamen into the armed forces, it is important to comply with the agreed numbers: one of the reasons for Yemen's civil war and indeed the renewal of Angola's civil war was the perception that the levels of integration did not occur as promised. Vetting procedures would have to be applied to both sides, and follow criteria of integrity as well as capacity. As in scenario 2, vetting would have to occur based on individual behaviour rather than group affiliation – but as the principles will have to be agreed on jointly, this is likely to lead to a watered-down and drawn-out process.

Following the assembly, the Syrian military would benefit from a profound reform in order to achieve cohesion and join its troops together in one body. Civil oversight mechanisms in this scenario would benefit from a joint body in order to increase trust and promote cooperation.

The question of security management in this scenario remains one of the trickiest. In the absence of a foreign stabilisation force, it is unlikely that the forces – former opposition or regime – would be capable of undergoing the described process of assembly and reform while providing security. Spoilers in this scenario would have a higher chance of derailing the process through protracted instability and violence, which would delegitimise the process altogether, and potentially lead to renewed conflict. This would particularly be the case if reintegration programmes for excluded troops from either side of the conflict are not available.

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# Syria's Economy: War Damage and Possible Peacekeeping and Reconstruction

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## Introduction

The Syrian civil war that started in 2011 has done extensive damage to its economy. Infrastructure, industrial plants and houses have been destroyed. The oil and gas industry is in shambles. Electricity provision is sporadic. Agricultural supply and distribution chains have been disrupted. Precious archaeological sites and artefacts that used to attract tourists have been ruined.

Above all there is the humanitarian toll. In a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-funded report the Syrian Centre for Policy Research (SCPR) found that in early 2016 the direct and indirect death toll of the conflict has reached 470,000, far higher than the figure of 250,000 that the United Nations (UN) used until it stopped collecting related statistics in 2014 for lack of access to data. The death toll has been growing since then. Countless others have been injured and maimed, physically as well as psychologically. The SCPR report estimates that 11.5% of the Syrian population has been either injured or killed (Syrian Centre for Policy Research, 2016). Over half of the pre-war population of 21.4 million has been displaced: 6.6 million have been displaced within the country, there are almost 5 million UNHCR registered refugees in neighbouring countries, mainly Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, and over one million Syrians have sought asylum in Europe (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2017; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2017). A staggering 13.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance (OCHA, 2017) and 45.2% of children do not attend school anymore—a “lost generation” in the making, whose future opportunities will be compromised by this educational collapse (Syrian Centre for Policy Research, 2016).

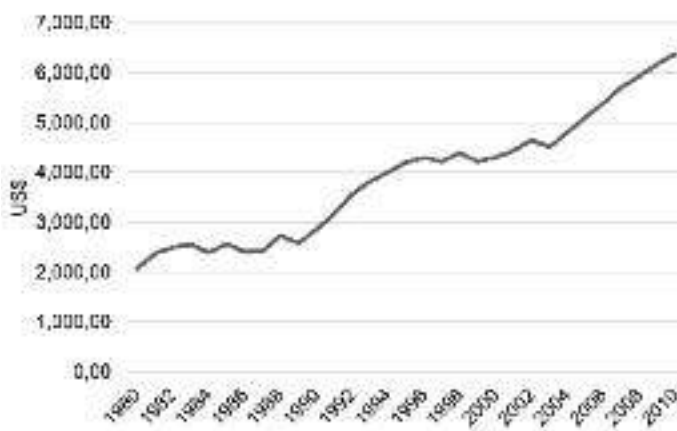
Without economic reconstruction, ending the war and finding a political solution to the conflict will not prove possible or sustainable. Only if Syrians are given credible hope and avenues of economic recovery will a lasting solution be conceivable. On the other hand, attempts at economic reconstruction will be stopped in their tracks without an improvement of the security situation, which is an immediate necessity. Against this backdrop, this paper first analyses the Syrian economy before the war, war-related damages and possible financing of reconstruction. Secondly, it gives an overview of past efforts at peacekeeping in the region and discusses what lessons can be learnt from them for any Syrian peacekeeping and reconstruction effort. Finally, it analyses several scenarios of how this may play out in detail.

## The Syrian Economy before the War

A casual look at the long-term development of Syrian GDP per capita as measured on a purchasing power parity (PPP) basis reveals considerable growth (see Figure 1), despite the rapid increase of the population that occurred during the decades before the civil war – the Syrian population more than doubled between 1980 and 2010 from 9.1 million to 21.4 million.

In the 1980s, Syria, like many other developing countries, faced a debt crisis that led to sluggish growth over this “lost decade”. Considerable growth occurred in the first half of the 1990s, buttressed by the steep rise in Syrian oil production (see Figure 3) and some economic reform. It was undertaken independently of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and sought to mobilise domestic and international private capital as Syria’s overextended security state faced funding shortages (Perthes, 1995). The opportunity to attract external strategic rents was greatly diminished after the end of the Cold War, but got a second lease on life when Syria participated in the Allied coalition for the liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi occupation in 1991. Syria had a very high debt/GNP ratio of 169% (De Melo & Panagariya, 1993). It could make good use of the Gulf funds and debt forgiveness schemes that it received for its contribution to the Kuwait liberation. As a result of this move it was also granted a free hand in Lebanon by the US. It was able to continue its occupation of parts of the country, which gave it control over the lucrative smuggling business that benefited its military security networks.

**Figure 1.** Syrian GDP per capita, based on purchasing-power-parity (PPP), 1980-2010



Source: IMF, 2016.

After a lull from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, growth accelerated in the 2000s when Syria benefitted from the oil boom in the region with some remaining net exports, but also via migrant remittances from the sizeable Syrian expat community in the Gulf region. However, this growth was unbalanced regionally and socially and was in fact accompanied by increasing poverty among parts of the populace. The economic liberalisation and privatisation measures of the regime of Bashar al-Assad mainly catered to cronies among its urban clients and within military security networks who got rich via exclusive import and business licences. The rural population and the urban poor were neglected. The ruling coalition retrenched to a smaller circle and earlier institutions of mass mobilisation such as the Baath party lost importance (Hinnebusch, 2012; Haddad, 2011). A drought in the second half of the 2000s put additional pressure on the rural population and aggravated these trends (De Chatel, 2014; Sowers, Waterbury & Woertz, 2013; Woertz, 2014a).

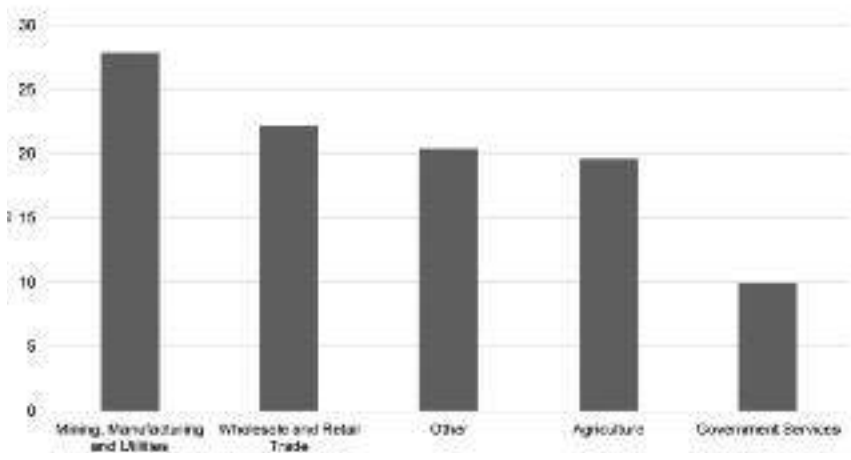
Before the civil war, mining, manufacturing and utilities constituted the largest part of the Syrian economy with 28% (see Figure 2). This reflected the still sizeable oil and gas sector, but also phosphate mining and light manufacturing, such as pharmaceuticals, food processing and textiles. The second largest component was wholesale and retail trade (22%). Agriculture constituted 20% of GDP, comparable to its share in the labour force. With 43% of the total population, the relative weight of the rural population in Syria was even higher, signalling considerable underemployment in the countryside. Compared to other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Syria is not as urbanised; only Egypt, Sudan and Yemen have higher relative weights of rural population (Woertz, 2016; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], 2016.; UN, 2014). Government services constituted 10% of Syrian GDP. Among the “other” category, tourism was noteworthy, which had seen steep growth over the preceding two decades and represented about 8% of GDP, employment and capital investment in 2010, if indirect and induced effects of the industry were included in the calculation, such as purchases from suppliers and spending of direct and indirect employees (World Travel and Tourism Council [WTTC], 2015).

The importance of oil for the Syrian economy can hardly be underestimated. After strong growth in the early 1970s production levelled out until the mid-1980s. It then increased more than threefold from 1985 to 1995 and peaked in 2002 (see Figure 3). In the decade prior to the civil war, Syria’s ageing fields of difficult to produce heavy oil witnessed steep decline, production almost halved from 677,000 barrels per day (bpd) in 2002 to 353,000 bpd in 2011. Syria needed to mix its domestic heavy oil production with imported light oil for refining purposes and also imported refined petroleum products for the local market. By 2008, the overall petroleum balance turned negative for the first



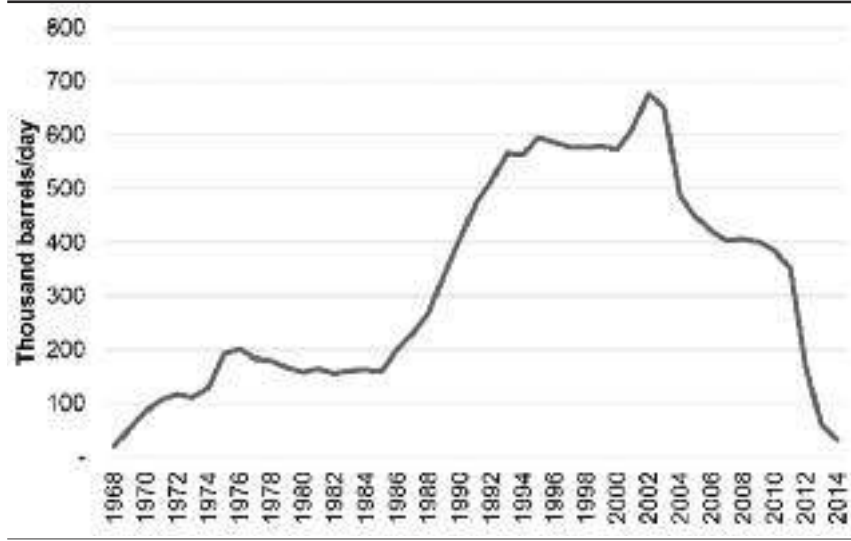
time as the value of imports of refined products exceeded net exports of crude oil (US Energy Information Administration [EIA], 2015). As a result of the war, production plummeted after 2011. In 2014 it was only 33,000 bpd, most of which came from oil fields held by the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS) in the east of the country.

**Figure 2.** Syrian GDP composition, 2010



Source: Butter, 2015.

**Figure 3.** Syrian oil production 1968-2015



Source: BP, 2016.

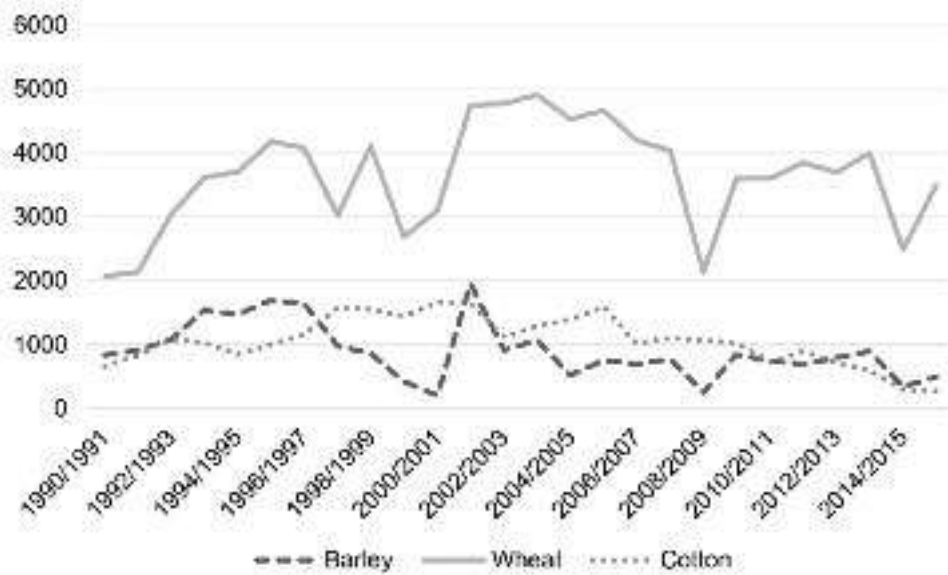
Similarly, natural gas developed into an important pillar of the domestic economy. Apart from the hydro generated electricity from the Tabqa Dam near Raqqa, most of Syria's power stations are gas fired. In contrast to oil, Syrian natural gas production did not fall ahead of the civil war, quite the contrary. The production of associated gas declined alongside oil production, but important sources of non-associated gas were discovered in central Syria in the 2000s: the Al-Shaer field developed by the Ebla Gas Company with Canadian Suncor as operating partner and the Jihar scheme, which was developed by Hayan Petroleum, with Croatian INA as operating partner. Both fields lifted Syrian gas output sharply to 8 billion cubic metres (bcm) in 2010 and to 8.7 bcm in 2011, up from an average of 5.5 bcm in the preceding five years. Despite these new production streams, Syria turned into a modest gas net importer in 2008 and has remained one ever since; however, its ability to import has been severely compromised by the conflict. The gas comes from Egypt via Jordan through the Arab Gas Pipeline (EIA, 2015).

Anticipating the terminal decline of oil production, the al-Assad regime envisaged developing Syria into a gas-trading hub from neighbouring countries such as Iraq and Iran to create new sources of revenue (Ahmed, 2015). It also had hopes that it might find offshore natural gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean, as neighbouring Israel and Cyprus did in the late 2000s (Darbouche, El-Katiri & Fattouh, 2012).

The oil boom caused Dutch disease and a neglect of agriculture in many MENA countries; Syria was a partial exception. The al-Assad regime encouraged grain self-sufficiency for strategic reasons and cultivated a political support base in rural areas with the help of land reform and agricultural subsidies (Hinnebusch, El Hindi, Khaddam, & Ababsa, 2011; Hinnebusch, 1989). Like elsewhere in the developing world, a "hydraulic mission" was weaved into a national narrative. Syrian agricultural policies had a strong focus on large-scale irrigation projects such as the Tabqa Dam, which was finished in 1973.

In terms of production there was ostensible success: output increased. The irrigated area doubled between 1985 and 2000, Syria became self-sufficient in wheat by the mid-1990s and remained so with a short interruption in 1999/2000 until 2008 when it suffered a severe drought (see Figure 4) (De Chatel, 2014; United States Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2017). However, the ecological impact was problematic. The system focused on water-intensive crops like cotton and wheat, relied on over-pumping of groundwater (Voss et al., 2013), used inefficient flood irrigation and expanded into fragile steppe ecosystems. The segmented bureaucratic Syrian state with its competing agencies shrouded water issues in strategic secrecy and was incapable of introducing more efficient water management practices (De Chatel, 2014).

**Figure 4.** Syrian wheat, barley and cotton production 1990/91-2015/16 (thousand metric tons for wheat and barley, thousand bales à 480lb for cotton)



Source: USDA, 2017

In the wake of the al-Assad regime's economic liberalisation agricultural support schemes were dismantled at an accelerated pace after 2005. Small-scale farmers were left exposed to the drought that wrought havoc between 2006 and 2010. Hundreds of thousands of farmers and their families faced severe food insecurity and were forced to migrate to the cities (UN, 2011). The resulting crisis played a role in the Syrian uprising, which started in rural areas and mid-sized towns like Deraa and Deir al-Zor and only later reached the bigger cities like Aleppo and Damascus. The drought in Syria was severe and its likelihood had increased as a result of the anthropogenic climate change that can be observed in the Eastern Mediterranean (Kelley, Mohtadi, Cane, Searer, & Kushnir, 2015). Yet Francisca de Chatel (2014) points out that the social crisis in Syria's northeast started earlier and was attributable to decades of water mismanagement and corruption that were exacerbated by economic liberalisation enacted by the Syrian regime since the mid-1980s and then at an accelerated pace in the 2000s.

In sum, on the eve of its civil war, Syria was a lower middle-income country of the developing world that had seen considerable, but unbalanced, growth over the preceding decade with growing social polarisation and rampant crony capitalism. Tourism had grown, trading was brisk and Syria had some industrial base in the form of light

manufacturing, but it struggled to find a recipe for economic diversification to make up for its declining oil production and had a sizeable rural population and agricultural sector that were hit by liberalisation policies, drought and internal migration.

## War Damage

### Population loss

Syria's government has not published population figures since 2011. After deducting documented and undocumented refugees and deaths, David Butter (2016) estimates that currently there are no more than 15-16 million people residing within Syria. About 6.6 million of these residents have been internally displaced (OCHA, 2017). Population movements have been highly complex. Damascus has about kept its size, replacing some refugees with internally displaced people (IDPs), but its countryside has been heavily depopulated by the war. The same is true for Aleppo, Homs, Idlib, Deraa and Deir Ezzor and recently also for ISIS occupied Al Raqqa. In contrast, Sweida, Quneitra and Al Hassakah were able to roughly keep their population numbers and the coastal regions such as Tartous and Lattakia saw an increase as a result of the influx of IDPs (Butter, 2016).

### Education, Health Care and Food Security

Education has suffered, school buildings have been destroyed and teachers have been displaced or killed. Depending on the level of conflict, going to school can be dangerous and parents often keep their children at home, even in places where schooling is still being offered. It is estimated that 45.2% of school age children do not attend school anymore (Syrian Centre for Policy Research, 2016). Schooling among Syrian refugee children in neighbouring countries is spotty; over half of refugee children in Lebanon and Jordan do not attend school (UNHCR, 2014). Housing can be far away from schools, there can be legal barriers pertaining to the acceptance of certificates and children need to contribute to the livelihood of their families via child labour. Organisation of schooling can also be challenging; in Lebanon mathematics and sciences are being taught in English and French but Syrian school children often only understand Arabic (Khaled, 2012).

Health indicators have declined dramatically, services are not provided anymore in many places and supplies of medication are insufficient. Of the estimated 470,000 deaths attributed to the war, about 70,000 have not died because of direct violence but because

of indirect effects such as health issues, hunger and malnutrition (Syrian Centre for Policy Research, 2016). Syria's food security situation was already deemed "serious" before the war. With 29% it had a high share of stunted children, which pointed to widespread micronutritional deficiencies, such as lack of vitamins and iron (Breisinger, Ecker, Al-Riffai, & Yu, 2012). Food security has worsened further since then. The al-Assad regime has used food as a weapon and has sought to starve rebel-held areas such as Yarmouk into submission, which led to particularly grave food insecurity in these locations.

### Economic Indicators

Syria's economy continues to deteriorate amid the ongoing conflict, declining by 62% from 2010 to 2014 according to the CIA (CIA Factbook, 2016). The unemployment rate was a staggering 58% in 2014 and 83% of the population lived below the poverty line (CIA Factbook, 2016). The Syrian pound devalued by 80% between 2011 and 2015 and inflation has averaged 51% between January 2012 and March 2015, according to data of the Syrian government (Butter, 2015).

The government continues to pay salaries and pensions to about 2 million people and their families, but such payments are not enough to make ends meet. If one does not have access to some form of agricultural production this leaves only transfer payments, aid and participation in the war economy of smuggling, looting and mercenary activities (Butter, 2016).

### Agriculture

Agriculture has been less affected by the war than oil, tourism and industries. Its relative contribution to GDP has about doubled, making it the largest contributor to a greatly reduced GDP, which currently is about half its extrapolated potential from 2011 levels (Butter, 2015).

Irrigation infrastructure is vulnerable to conflict-related impacts and has been particularly affected, such as fruit and vegetable production in the Orontes Bassin and irrigated summer production of cotton in the northeast. In contrast, rain-fed grain production has fared better (Jaafar, & Woertz, 2016; Jaafar, Zurayk, King, Ahmad, & Al-Outa, 2015). A significant part of Syria's grain and cotton-producing regions in the northeast are under the control of ISIS.

Provision of quality seeds via the General Organization for Seed Multiplication (GOSM) has been disrupted. This can develop into a major impediment to agricultural production

in the near future as seed quality typically declines after 3-4 planting seasons (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO] & World Food Programme [WFP], 2015).

## Trade

Syria's trade has suffered tremendously and its trade patterns and partners have changed. It has lost its pre-war self-sufficiency in crude oil and grains, which it now imports to a large extent from Iran and Russia. Its main remaining exports in 2014 were phosphates, sheep, fruit and vegetables, dairy products and semi-finished products (Butter, 2015).

Syria now crucially depends on Iranian oil deliveries and an Iranian credit line for the purchase of commodities. In contrast, trade with Europe has suffered as a result of sanctions. Iraq, formerly the single most important destination for Syrian exports, has also declined in importance. Imports from Turkey initially fell sharply in 2012 and 2013 but have since recovered, partly because of the economy of aid flows, partly because Syrian manufacturers who have relocated to Turkey have launched operations there for export to Syria (Butter, 2015; Butter, 2016).

## Oil and Refining

Syria's oil output has plummeted (see Figure 3). The Syrian government is not in control of oil fields anymore, apart from some upstream facilities around Homs. During 2012 and 2013 tribes and clans of Deir el Zor and Al Hassakah took over control of wellheads in the east. They had long felt that benefits of oil production did not accrue sufficiently to the disadvantaged eastern region of Syria (Butter, 2015).

The oil was then transported by traders to trading and refining hubs in the north close to the Turkish border. Later on ISIS took over wellhead control. While it had considerable revenues from these fields in 2014/15, these revenues have now been considerably reduced as a result of bombardments by the US and Russia, insufficient maintenance and lack of knowhow (Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c). Never large by regional standards, most of this oil is not exported to neighbouring countries, but consumed within Syria (Solomon, Chazan, & Jones, 2015).

The main refinery in government-held territory is in Banyas, whose main crude oil feedstock now comes from Iran. It produced about 98,000 bpd in 2015. Regime-held areas also import some liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) from ISIS-controlled plants (Butter, 2016).

Syria's ageing oil fields were already in decline before the war and are now badly damaged. In a best-case scenario, Syria could regain a degree of self-sufficiency after reconstruction and application of enhanced oil recovery, but not much more and not in the long run, given the quality of the fields and their remaining reserve life.

If flows through the pipeline from the fields in northern Hasaka via Raqqa to Homs resumed, Syria could reduce its current oil imports. A construction of refineries in Deir ez-Zor and Hasaka governorates that had been debated before the war could bring local populations on board and address their long-running complaints about being left out of the oil business. International oil companies that had been joint venture partners and had to cease operations in compliance with EU sanctions in 2011 would need to sort out legal issues (Butter, 2016).

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**Table 1.** Syrian oil production, March 2011 (b/d)

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Operating Company	Location	Output
SPC	Hassakeh and Raqqah	195,000
AFPC (Shell)	Euphrates Valley	92,000
DZPC (Total)	Euphrates Valley	21,000
SIPC (Sinopec)	S Hassakeh	20,000
Dijla (Gulfsands)	NE Hassakeh	24,000
Kawkab (CNPC)	NE Hassakeh	12,000
Rasheed (IPR)	Euphrates Valley	4,000
Hayan (INA)	West of Palmyra	9,000
Albu-Kamal (Tatneft)	S Euphrates Valley	12,000
<b>Total*</b>		<b>387,000</b>

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\*Includes estimates of 8,000 b/d of condensates production

Source: Butter, 2015.

### Natural Gas and Electricity Generation

Control of natural gas fields is crucial for electricity provision in Syria, which has declined by more than 70% (Butter, 2015). In early 2016 natural gas fields to the west of Palmyra that feed power plants outside Damascus and Homs were under government control, while ISIS controlled other fields to the south of Raqqa and east of Palmyra that provide gas to power stations in northern and central Syria (Butter, 2016). This has opened avenues for energy cooperation between the government

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and ISIS, with the latter providing natural gas and the former delivering electricity in return (Woertz, 2014b). ISIS has also delivered electricity from the Tabqa Dam to Aleppo against payment (Pearce, 2014). The strategically important Shaer gas field has seen several pitched battles between ISIS and the Syrian army, in July and October/November 2014 and in May and December 2016 when ISIS gained control of the field. ISIS lost control of the Thaura field in Raqqa province in June 2016 and of the Hayan and Mustadira fields in the vicinity of Palmyra in February and March 2017, leaving vast destruction of infrastructure behind. Currently, the Syrian regime is preparing to retake the Shaer field from ISIS (Kaletovic, 2017; “Syrian Army is Ready to Liberate Gas Fields”, 2017; “Syrian Army Retake Control Of Mustadira Gas Field”, 2017).

Electricity production has fallen by 70% since the start of the war. Effective generating capacity in the second half of 2015 had fallen to about 2,000 MW, much lower than 7,900 MW in 2013 and the pre-conflict capacity of about 9,700 MW. Combined cycle plants around Homs and Damascus produced about half of the country’s electricity in 2013: 14,342 GWh of a total 29,922 GWh. Hydroelectric plants along the Euphrates like the Tabqa Dam near Raqqa have a combined capacity of 1,080 MW (Butter, 2015). Securing feedstock for the power plants is seemingly difficult. The older gas fields in Al Hasskah province no longer provide gas to the west due to pipeline damage. About 80% of Syria’s current gas production now comes from the Homs-Palmyra region and the Shaer and Jihar fields described above (Butter, 2015).

### **Phosphates and Light Manufacturing**

Phosphate exports by the Syrian government were still around \$100 million in 2014 (Butter, 2015) but ISIS captured Syria’s largest phosphate mine close to Palmyra in 2015, which led to a steep decline in production. Much of Syria’s light manufacturing of textiles, pharmaceuticals and food processing has been destroyed, is affected by supply disruptions of inputs or has been relocated across the border to Turkey.

### **Tourism**

Tourism has developed into an important pillar of economic diversification since the 1990s. Tourism is labour intensive and provided considerable economic impetus via procurement and ancillary services. Rich in archaeological sites, Syria also attracted the kind of educational and cultural tourism preferred by senior citizens, who tend to



leave more money in the country than young backpackers. The number of arriving tourists grew from two million in 2000 to over eight million in 2010 (Trading Economics, 2017). Now tourism has all but collapsed.

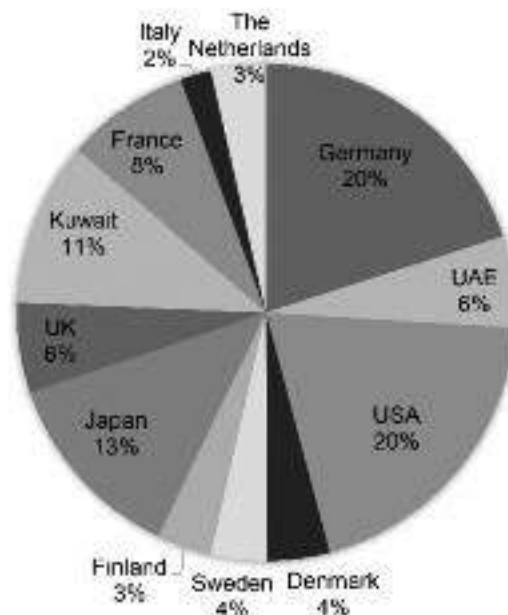
Major tourism sites in Syria like the Krak de Chevaliers near Homs, the old city of Aleppo and the ruins of Palmyra have been affected by conflict. The minaret of the Umayyad mosque and the old souk in Aleppo as well as the famous Bal Shamin temple in Palmyra have been destroyed and museums have been looted, although not to the same extent as in neighbouring Iraq.<sup>1</sup> Some of these sites could be rebuilt, but a resumption of tourism is only conceivable after an extended period of calm and an abatement of security concerns.

## Possible Funds for Reconstruction

The costs of the Syrian civil war have been estimated at \$275 billion by World Vision International. Because of lost growth, its immediate costs would have continued to increase to between \$448 and \$689 billion, even if the conflict had ended in 2016. If the civil war rages on, its total costs could reach \$1.3 trillion by 2020 (World Vision International, 2016). The necessary investment volume to address Syria's war damage is truly staggering. At this stage it is unclear where this money could come from. First experiences with the Syria Recovery Trust Fund (SRTF) point to the importance of donors from OECD countries and the Gulf. Since its inception in 2013 until November 2016 the SRTF has received grants of €154 million. Beside the three original donors, Germany, the US and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), other countries from Europe, Japan and Kuwait rank prominently. Emerging markets such as China have not contributed to the fund so far (see Figure 5) (Syria Recovery Trust Fund, 2017).

The SRTF is a multi-donor trust fund that was initiated by the Group of Friends of the Syrian People and its Working Group on Economic Recovery and Development. The goal of the fund is to allocate grant funding from the international community to reconstruction projects inside Syria in a transparent and accountable manner. After the end of the Lebanese civil war in 1990 financing from expat Lebanese was crucial in the reconstruction effort. Beside international donors, remittances from the substantial Syrian diaspora in Europe and Latin America could become a source for funds for Syrian reconstruction, too. However, a necessary precondition for more substantial flows would be an improvement of the security situation.

<sup>1</sup>For a list of affected sites, see <http://en.unesco.org/syrian-observatory/>, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/sy>

**Figure 5.** Donor structure of the Syria Recovery Trust Fund

Source: SRTF, 2017

## Peacekeeping while Reconstructing: Lessons Learned from Former Experiences

The establishment of a peacekeeping mission to supervise any potential ceasefire, or even peace agreement, between the parties in conflict in Syria is a plausible option on the table. The Middle East has become a propitious laboratory for UN peacekeeping initiatives, first with the creation of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in 1948, amid the First Arab-Israeli War and later with the appointment of the first Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Folke Bernadotte, who had the mission to take care of the Palestine file (Kennedy, 2007, pp.117-118). Against this background, this section sheds light on the possible shape of a future peacekeeping mission in Syria and its role in post-conflict reconstruction. It presents four major lessons learned about peacekeeping during reconstruction that are of vital importance, drawing on former similar experiences, mostly in the Middle East and North Africa region, where the United Nations has played a significant role in peacekeeping and reconstruction. This includes the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) missions and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in the Golan Heights, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the UN Department of Political Affairs

(DPA) in Southern Lebanon, the UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS), the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OESGY) and the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). Beside these UN-framework peacekeeping and reconstruction actions, the lessons presented here are greatly influenced by the reconstruction experiences in Lebanon after the end of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) and the 2006 events and in Iraq after the 2003 International Coalition's invasion.

### **Lesson 1: Let peacekeepers do their job (in proper conditions)**

It seems likely that, in the event of a ceasefire or a peace agreement between some – if not all – of the major parties in the Syrian conflict, an external third party will be requested to administer the commitments and supervise the parties' activity on the ground. The most compelling duties of any such mission will be the supervision of division lines between the parties – or the buffer zones between them, if created – as well as the verification of arms control regimes established for specific hot spots. The consolidation of peace is dependent on the respect for these separation lines. At the same time, the effectiveness and continuity of initial reconstruction measures are dependent on the consolidation of peace. Yet, former experiences in the region show that peacekeeping efforts need to be well funded and equipped to fully succeed. Furthermore, they must be granted enough flexibility on the ground to readapt mechanisms and proceedings amid a changing volatile reality. If these two conditions are not met, conflict parties will likely spoil the benefits of the truce amid a growing spiral of mistrust. Hence, continuous funding commitments of international donors and a flexible mandate are essential for successful peacekeeping missions.

A successful example is the work of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in the Golan Heights over the last 40 years. This UN DPKO peacekeeping mission was created on 31 May 1974, after the 1973 October War, by the Agreement of Disengagement drafted and signed by Israel and Syria and later on adopted as a United Nations Security Council Resolution (United Nations Security Council [UNSC], 1974). Broadly speaking, the UNDOF mission has consisted of monitoring the buffer zones between Israel and Syria, which encompassed an Area of Separation (AOS) of over 80 km and a broader Area of Limitation (AOL), and verifying the arms control regime at this buffer zone. The UNDOF has achieved this through a verification system including continuous patrolling, fixed posts and the examination of military positions every two weeks (Fetterly, 2003, pp. 86-87). The Agreement also established the Israel-Syria Mixed Armistice Commission (ISMALC), which supervised the implementation of the ceasefire

agreement between the parties through the assistance of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), an integral part of the UNDOF consisting of unarmed military observers. This mechanism, the UNTSO, has also been used in other similar peacekeeping missions, most notably the UNIFIL in Southern Lebanon, and has proved to be an effective tool in supervising this type of agreement. It could be a serious option in the design of any future peacekeeping mission for Syria.

Despite how good the mission looks on paper, over its more than forty years of life the UNDOF has faced many problems that can shed some light on potential shortcomings of any similar future physical separation mission in Syria. Most importantly, there are two major problems: lack of flexibility of the mandate and problems with resources for the mission. Regarding the first problem, Dan Lindley (2010) identifies five major shortcomings of the UNDOF's supervising duty: (1) the number of troops is generally not verified but rather the UNDOF accepts the numbers provided by the parties;<sup>2</sup> (2) the inspectors only supervise visible weapons; (3) no surprise inspections take place and consequently the parties adapt their behaviour in light of the scheduled UN supervisions;<sup>3</sup> (4) both parties systematically prevent the UNDOF supervisor to access some parts of the AOL; and (5) there are not enough troops to cover all the AOS and AOL effectively nor are they equipped with night vision equipment to fulfil their obligations at night. All this suggests that the lack of flexibility of the mission, corseted by a strictly limited UN Security Council mandate, seriously undermines the feasibility of achieving its objectives.<sup>4</sup> This issue is also evident in the experience of UNIFIL in Lebanon, obtaining a realistic and flexible mandate in view of the realities on the ground is compulsory, otherwise the objectives of the mission might be in danger (Novosseloff, 2015). In the case of a future peacekeeping mission in Syria, this flexibility would be even more important as the separation lines between parties would be far more complicated to manage (more parties, more extensive separation lines crossing all Syria, probably some belligerent parties with higher incentives to trick supervisors and undermine the peace, etc.).

Regarding the second problem of funding the mission, Major E. Ross Fetterly, who is the former Deputy Commanding Officer of the UNDOF Logistics Battalion, points out that one of the major lessons learnt is that resources allocated over time cannot decrease dramatically, as happened in the case of the UNDOF (Novosseloff, 2015). He suggests there is a tendency to reduce the appropriate amount of resources allocated to peacekeeping missions before the actual end of the mission is achieved, as time passes

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2 This is mainly due to the lack of resources of the mission to carry out its duty properly, thus connecting the first and the second problems.

3 As stated by Lindley, "UNDOF's predictable standard operating procedures for its biweekly inspections allow for cheating by parties who can move forces up and back to avoid being in violation under the UNDOF and UNTSO inspectors visit". Lindley, D. (2010, June 3). UNDOF: Operational analysis and lessons learned. *Defense and Security Analysis*, 20(2), 153-164. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1475179042000219116>, p. 10.

4 This point is also backed in Fetterly, R. (2003). UNDOF: The catalyst for peace building on the Golan Heights. In A. Woodcock and D. Davis (Eds.), *The Cornwallis Group VII: Analysis for compliance and peace building*. Clementsport: Canadian Peacekeeping Press, p. 96.

and global attention on the specific case is reduced. This seriously compromised the UNDOF's mission goals as it caused equipment problems and limited the number of its personnel on the ground. In the case of any future Syrian peacekeeping mission, it is crucial to avoid funding shortfalls after the initial enthusiasm to fund such operations subsidies.

## **Lesson 2: Post-conflict reconstruction and development policies are not (and must not) be the same**

On many occasions in the past, global donors and the plethora of international actors working on peacekeeping and the initial stages of post-conflict reconstructions have wrongly equated reconstruction policies with regular development policies used in non-post-conflict scenarios. It is important to understand that the objectives of these two toolkits are different. Broadly speaking, development policies of international donors like the World Bank and the IMF aim at structural modifications in developing economies to facilitate long-term growth. Post-conflict reconstruction policies also target a general improvement of the economic conditions of the citizens affected by the conflict, but their ultimate purpose is to contribute to peace by changing the incentive structures of the parties. Their main goal is essentially the creation of compensations for the belligerents for their decision to abandon fighting and thus prevent violence from resuming. Politics must prevail over economics at this stage as the first-best economic policies might not be adequate in the context; recovery policies must not be judged by yardsticks other than how much they contribute to peace.

This broader appreciation can be narrowed down into three key ideas to take into account in the Syrian case. The first one has to do with the so-called *peace dividends*. These are broadly defined as the cluster of positive economic benefits obtained by societies once they put conflict to an end and which might not be obtained should violence continue.<sup>5</sup> Former experiences show that during the initial stages of post-conflict scenarios, it is crucial to achieve quick peace dividends to encourage support for the end of violence. Cases like Afghanistan underline the problems associated with overspending in the security sector and abandoning alternative sectors that could also provide quick peace dividends. For instance, the de-mobilisation of combatants is a critical issue to deal with at the very beginning of the post-conflict period and investment in potential job alternatives for them is highly reasonable, but providing social benefits to their relatives can also increase their incentives towards peace. Peace dividends might

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion on this use of the notion and some analysis in concrete case studies, see, for instance, Butter, D. (2016, March). Salvaging Syria's economy. London: Chatham House. Retrieved from <https://syria.chathamhouse.org/assets/documents/2016-03-15-syria-economy-butter.pdf>; Chan, S. (1995). Grasping the peace dividend: Some propositions on the conversion of sword into plowshares. *Mershon International Studies Review*, 39(1), 53-95. doi: 10.2307/222692; Byrne, S., & Irvin, C. (2001). Economic aid and policy making: Building the peace dividend in Northern Ireland. *Policy and Politics*, 29(4), 413-429. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1332/0305573012501431>; Schiavo-Campo, S., & Judd, M. (2005). The Mindanao conflict in the Philippines: Roots, costs, and potential peace dividend. *Social development papers. Conflict prevention and reconstruction series*, No. 24. Washington, DC: World Bank. Retrieved from <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/701961468776746799/The-Mindanao-conflict-in-the-Philippines-roots-costs-and-potential-peace-dividend>

be achieved by different means, which can, in some instances, be cheaper and easier to achieve than pure investment in the security sector (including Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration or Security Sector Reform initiatives). It is important to keep in mind that peace dividends can be derived from a broad spectrum of activities, which should all be integrated into post-conflict planning by peacekeeping and reconstruction actors.

Additionally, it is important to understand that on some occasions peace dividends might not make much sense from a pure long-term economic recovery perspective yet they are still essential for consolidating peace. Offering compensations to those actors who conceded the most in the peace negotiations is an option that works well in preventing violence from resuming in the short term. This option must not be discredited from the very beginning just for economic reasons and it must be assessed only in terms of its contribution to the strengthening of peace.

The second idea is that the *absorption capacity* of aid in post-conflict societies of developing countries might be initially limited. Planning must be careful not to overwhelm recipients with initial flows of aid that they cannot digest. Absorption capacity evolves over time: There is a risk of releasing too many funds at the beginning when donor generosity tends to be greatest and cutting back later on when absorption capacity has caught up. Post-conflict analysis should not only consist of an assessment of the Syrian needs but should also include a calculation of absorption capacity.

Finally, one of the critical conclusions of recent reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, Iraq and Mali is that *separate silos approaches* (i.e. security, economic and political issues treated separately) should be avoided.<sup>6</sup> Otherwise there is the risk that security and economic sectors establish parallel, unconnected agendas based on their own sectoral logic. The *Final Report from the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction* suggested that an integrative approach (mainly a civilian-military one) is the primary lesson to be learned from the peacekeeping and reconstruction efforts of the United States in Iraq since 2003. It is the only way to check that every single action undertaken respects the top political priority of reconstruction, namely the consolidation of peace (United States House of Representatives, 2013, pp. 15-17).

### **Lesson 3: Avoid denying Syrians their agency to decide what to do best**

The ability of people affected by conflict to decide their future needs to be respected in the design of reconstruction agendas. International organisations undertaking

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<sup>6</sup> The discussion of the problems of the separate silos approach was especially important at the United Nations, the United States Departments of State and Defence, and the United Kingdom Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence. See United Nations Secretary-General's Advisory Group of Experts (2015). Letter on the 2015 Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture addressed to the Presidents of the Security Council and of the General Assembly. New York; Wilton Park. (2014). *Stabilisation after 2014: Lessons from contemporary operations* (Conference Report). Organised by the United Kingdom Stabilisation Unit and Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC) and the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. WP 1337. London.

peacekeeping responsibilities and international donors contributing to reconstruction should understand that becoming an overbearing actor can ultimately harm peace. One of the problems in peacekeeping and reconstruction in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya was the tendency of many actors to project their priorities and values on the recipients.<sup>7</sup>

In Lebanon and especially Iraq the unquestionable projection of liberal economic principles and privatisation agendas has done considerable harm during the reconstruction process. International actors had a critical role in shaping the economic structure of the countries by deregulating many important economic sectors while narrowing the role of the state in the economy. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs' (UNDESA) report on the *Lessons Learned in Post-Conflict State Capacity* was based on the cases of Northern Ireland, Nepal, Burundi, Sudan and Afghanistan and argued that one of the major lessons learned from former reconstruction experiences is that "the reconstruction of [the country's] governance and public administration capacity has to be done based on its socio-political-economic history and context" (UNDESA, 2009, p. 11).

Furthermore, the balance between public and private sectors must be considered: assumption of the advantages of the private sector, based on the individual experiences of the donors, might not be suitable for the specific situation of targeted societies. The experiences of Afghanistan and Iraq underline the problems of deregulation and privatisation of critical economic sectors and their impact on the consolidation of peace. The United Nations has expressed on repeated occasions that "efforts of rebuilding governance and public administration after conflict must include primarily strengthening the capacity of the public service." The public administration might be the best positioned actor to achieve quick peace dividends by providing social benefits in the form of restituted welfare services. As suggested in the 2010 World Public Sector Report on the challenges and lessons learned of reconstructing public administration after conflict, "the success of government in a post-conflict society depends on the performance of the public service in providing critical services to the population and restoring trust and confidence in governance" as this can "reduce tensions and grievances among groups struggling to meet basic needs and competing for scarce resources" (UNDESA, 2010, pp. XII, XVI). Thus, "strengthening government capacity to provide services becomes a means of promoting peace and spearheading economic development" (UNDESA, 2010, p. XVI). Not recognising this reality might prompt governmental actors to neglect their responsibilities, which can be harmful to peace building. This was the case in Lebanon after 2006 when "the Lebanese government regarded itself as a facilitator and enabler

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<sup>7</sup> This issue echoes the still ongoing debate around the liberal peace theory and its impact over intervention. See, for instance, Doyle, M. (2005). Three pillars of the liberal peace. *The American Political Science Review*, 99(3), 463-466. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055405051798>; Campbell, S., Chandler, D., & Sabaratnam, M. (Eds.). *A liberal peace?: The problems and practices of peacebuilding*. London: Zed Books.

of reconstruction, but did not regard itself as a primary reconstruction actor” (Hamieh & Mac Ginty, 2011, p. 182).

Additionally, the immediate retreat of the public sector has in many cases caused reconstruction money to return to the donors instead of remaining in the local economy. International donors should be aware of the problems associated with over-employing their own national NGOs and enterprises in the reconstruction of a third country. Avoiding the problem of aid money going back to the donors is central in making an impact on the situation on the ground. Moreover, privatisation processes ultimately harmed domestic post-conflict economies as international firms ended up occupying some economic spaces formerly under the responsibility of domestic enterprises. This was important in the case of the reconstruction of Iraq where, according to the Chilcot Report, the United Kingdom – but also France, Russia and other international actors involved in peacekeeping and reconstruction – included in its reconstruction plans the secondary objective of “ensuring that British companies benefited from any post-war reconstruction contracts” (House of Commons of the United Kingdom, 2016, p. 458). This was also confirmed by the bidding proposal for the USAID project on Economic Recovery, Reform and Sustained Growth in Iraq of June 2003, finally carried out by the Coalition Provisional Authority under Paul Bremmer’s leadership (Del Castillo, 2008, p. 207).

Finally, in that respect, these types of liberal economic agendas brought by the international actors generally do not give much room to paying attention to inequality. Not only poverty but inequality issues – on some occasions, as in the case of Syria, at the core of the conflict – need to be integrated into reconstruction policies, most especially when inequality entangled with the urban-rural cleavage. The case of the reconstruction in Lebanon where the core-periphery unbalanced reconstruction (Beirut vs. the rest) ultimately harmed the consolidation of peace in the rural areas should be kept under consideration for future reconstruction efforts in Syria.

#### **Lesson 4: Do not neglect the discussion on who should be in charge**

In the case of Syria, the United Nations’ credibility to undertake peacekeeping and reconstruction responsibilities could be compromised by its framework collaboration agreement with the al-Assad regime that triggered many humanitarian NGOs to stop collaborating with the UN (Hopkins & Beals, 2016; Osborne, 2016; “Syria’s War: Aid Agencies Suspend Cooperation”, 2016; Gladstone, 2016). Peacekeeping efforts might be severely harmed if some of the belligerent parties believe those in charge of



mediating and supervising ceasefire or peace agreements are biased towards the adversary. The UN would need to regain credibility among Syrians opposed to the al-Assad regime and alternative actors might occasionally be better placed to carry out some of the obligations traditionally assigned to the UN in post-conflict scenarios. However, given its competencies and experiences it would be difficult to find an alternative to the UN. Any foreign country willing and skilled to participate in peacekeeping and reconstruction efforts will not take on such a liability without the United Nations banner. Alternative international organisations like the Arab League, the European Union or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are not even an option for many parties. If the United Nations is still the option picked by the parties and the international community it must start any such effort by addressing its legitimacy gap in Syria.

### Looking Ahead: Three Scenarios

More than six years after the start of the war in Syria, it is still difficult to foresee violence coming to an end. And yet, the whole purpose of this exercise is to foresee under which circumstances international organisations could contribute to peacekeeping and reconstruction efforts. It is possible to project many scenarios, some of which could make any involvement of international actors in reconstruction efforts impossible. Yet, for the purpose of this paper we have decided to focus only on those of them that do create some space (albeit limited) for such initiatives and we have simplified them in three scenarios: reconstructing while fighting; reconstructing without peace; and reconstructing to consolidate peace.

There is a surge in debates and initiatives to start planning these reconstruction efforts. This may be an attempt to provide additional incentives, as we will discuss in our second scenario, for the contending parties to put an end to the conflict. And, in any case, starting to plan is not counterproductive, even if we do not know what the exact damage will be and the needs and timing of a feasible reconstruction strategy. Moreover, the discussions in which different international organisations have engaged indicate that, to date, any reconstruction planning in our third and preferable scenario (reconstruction to consolidate peace) seems to follow paths that are familiar, such as the emphasis on privatisation. As Yezid Sayigh (2016) recently warned, unless there is a change of strategy and practice, those reconstruction efforts could “empower those who already possess key political levers and social capital, and produce skewed results in terms of reintegration of refugees and displaced persons, societal reconciliation, and sustainable, equitable economic development.”

### Reconstructing while fighting

We could also depict that scenario as the status quo or as the perpetuation of the already existing situation. This is a scenario in which the war continues and where there is no meaningful attempt to find a political solution to the conflict. The UNSC would still be unable to act together due to mutual vetoes; regional powers would continue to endorse and finance local contenders and all the actors on the ground would perceive that fighting is the only way to secure their physical survival. Thus, this is a scenario in which the damages of the conflict are even higher and the need for reconstruction becomes more urgent. Yet, in the absence of peace prospects and willingness by all relevant players to de-escalate the conflict, peacekeeping initiatives are either inexistent or marginal.

Which kind of reconstruction efforts can take shape in such situation? These are limited in scope and are subordinated to the military strategies of the contenders. While there is no room for any structural long-term investments, there are four different kinds of reconstruction efforts that can take place: (re)building infrastructures that are key for the deployment of troops and the continuation of war efforts; providing basic services (electricity and water mainly) to the civilian areas that have been in the frontline and are now fully under control of one of the contenders; and reconstruction works with a strong symbolic connotation, for instance repairing damaged cultural heritage as a way to improve the image in either local or global public opinion.

In that scenario, the role for international players is rather limited. That is, domestic actors themselves would conduct most of those efforts while foreign actors' role would continue financing, directly or indirectly, the war effort as a whole. They may be invited, in some circumstances, and with not too much publicity, to support those reconstruction efforts through additional financial support or technical expertise but they would have a reactive role rather than a proactive one. All in all, these reconstruction efforts would have a limited impact on the daily life of Syrian citizens and would not improve the chances of putting an end to this conflict.

### Reconstructing without peace

This is a scenario marked by a ceasefire agreement among several contending parties, with the backing of global and regional powers. Yet, there is no comprehensive peace process. In political and administrative terms, Syria is a virtual territorial entity and there is no central institution whose authority applies to the whole territory. The terms of the ceasefire are not accepted by all the contenders and areas under control of a declining

ISIS or the successor of Al-Nusra front are at fully-fledged war. Additionally, the mainly Kurdish SDF militias may be left out of any possible agreements. Conflict between them and Turkey-backed rebels could escalate and become a parallel track in this multifaceted conflict.

This scenario allows for limited peacekeeping operations and reconstruction efforts. We can envisage some sort of peacekeeping operation, most likely based on a UNSC resolution and with a strong involvement of regional actors, to verify the terms of the ceasefire agreement, prevent conflict from escalating and control the international borders of Syria. This resolution may also contemplate the creation of safe zones in border areas with a dual aim of offering safe shelter to civilian population but also in an attempt to contain the influx of refugees and reduce the risk of the Syrian conflict spilling over its neighbours. Yet, with the exception of those safe zones, the peacekeeping forces have no influence on what happens inside the areas controlled by the signatories of the ceasefire agreement and they would strictly focus on assuring the terms of the agreement. Thus, such an operation would be purely military with no civilian component.

In this scenario there is a certain margin for reconstruction efforts but, as in the previous scenario, they would be limited in scope and would depend on bilateral agreements between donors and contenders. The exception to this rule would be reconstruction efforts in internationally-monitored safe zones. All these efforts may marginally improve the living conditions of the Syrian population, particularly if they focus on providing basic services (electricity and water) and could certainly create some jobs and open economic opportunities. Yet, in that scenario, levels of corruption would be on the rise and Syria would not get any closer to becoming a functional and sustainable state.

### **Reconstructing to consolidate peace**

Except for warlords and arms sellers, this is the preferable scenario and, unfortunately, one that has little more chance of happening than the previous ones, particularly the second. This is a scenario in which a political solution to a years-long conflict is endorsed in a peace conference, involving local, regional and global players. The parties would not only agree on the terms of a permanent ceasefire but also on a roadmap for an inclusive political transition that contemplates increased power and resources for local governments and a set of measures to support reconciliation and reconstruction.

This scenario contemplates the creation of a comprehensive UN-led peacekeeping and stabilisation mission with both military and civilian components that provides an umbrella

for the reconstruction efforts. Several donors including national governments, international organisations and international financial institutions would join forces in setting up a reconstruction fund that would not only target Syria but also Iraq and other neighbouring states that have been damaged by this war. Besides these internationally-led efforts, the Syrian diaspora proves to be active and on some occasions far more effective in launching a reconstruction project with quick gains for the population.

Most funds and efforts are devoted to the reconstruction of basic infrastructures (roads, water pipes, electric grids and sanitation) and health and education services. The goal being to recuperate pre-war life expectancy and school enrolment ratios. A significant effort is also put into supporting the building of affordable housing and programmes specifically targeting internally displaced people and refugees. The agriculture sector is also perceived as a key priority, both in terms of job creation and providing food supplies to the population. The same goes for some industrial sectors that are instrumental for broader reconstruction efforts. For these efforts to succeed they will require a functional public administration at different levels, with empowered local governments as well as effective police forces able to provide basic security.

This scenario entails many opportunities and could have positive spill-over beyond the Syrian borders. But it also involves two fundamental risks: to focus more on the donor capacities rather than on Syrian needs and to underestimate the capacities of local institutions and organisations that have played a key role during the war period in trying to mitigate the impact of the conflict on the civilian population.

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## **National Reconciliation and Protection of Minorities**

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## Introduction

The 2011 Syrian revolution cannot be detached from the historical events that the country had experienced for decades. The current Syrian regime, established in 1970 by Hafez al-Assad and resumed by his son Bashar in 2000, has been shaken by many divisions in Syrian society, to which the regime has managed to adjust to remain in power.

In the 1980s, several protest movements emerged within society and were violently repressed, resulting in thousands of deaths and the entrenchment of the culture of fear. The events of the 1980s had very few repercussions in the West. This was due to two main factors: on the one hand, some considered the Damascus regime a reliable ally and, on the other, access to information was not as democratized as at present thanks to social networks and satellite news channels.

After 20 years of brutal repression, some Syrian intellectuals tried to make their voices heard again in the days following Bashar al-Assad's accession to power in 2000, as the heir of the Republic after the death of his father Hafez (1970-2000).

Optimistic observers believed in a "Damascus Spring" long before the Arab springs but was hastily repressed. In 2005 the Damascus Declaration for National Democratic Change was signed by diverse sectors of the opposition, including communists, Islamists and liberals. Despite the moderate nature of the petitions formulated, repression was again a reality.

Submerged in a civil war since 2011, Bashar al-Assad's regime seems to be strengthened from its confrontation with Sunni Islamists but also with pro-Kurd militias backed by Shiite powers.

The chapter will analyse how the regime has been exploiting sectarian and confessional divisions, in order to gain political power. It will try to deconstruct several myths used in Syrian regime political rhetoric in order to present itself as the final line of defence for minorities in general. Finally, the chapter will provide some recommendations on how to address the false divisions of the Syrian society created by the regime, in order to be able to reconstruct the Syrian state based on a strong civil society.

## The Foundations of the Al-Assad Family Regime: a Defective Management of Diversity

The premises of confessionalism and the political exploitation of the question of minorities go far back in the history of the region. The two most recent episodes occurred in the final years of the Ottoman Empire (1516-1920) and under the French mandate (1920-1946). The occupying forces used the confessional approach to better control the societies under their supervision. Thus, the prevailing international forces of the time (France, the United Kingdom and Russia) strengthened the confessional approach of the empire when it was weakened by imposing rules on it concerning the management of the “minorities”.

The post-independence government found it hard to build a nation based on a real social contract despite the dynamism of Syrian society in the late 1940s and 1950s embodied by charity associations, literary salons and social movements always ideologically or organisationally linked to political movements. During those years, Syrians experienced a glimmering democracy with a relatively free parliamentary life, “real” elections and a blossoming press.

The alternation of brief democratic periods and coups after the end of the British mandate prevented democracy from taking root within Syrian society and strengthened ethnic, religious, confessional, tribal and regional affiliations. The coming to power of the Baath party via the 8 March 1963 coup confirmed this tendency and contributed to maintaining and even worsening the existing ethnic and religious divisions.

The new regime skilfully monitored, supported and developed the divisions between communities. The political and security measures adopted left no room for free political expression. Both associative life and the media space were appropriated. Affiliation to the party was the only criterion of emancipation for citizens.

Inspired by the experience of the German Democratic Republic, Hafez al-Assad, who took power in 1970, introduced a pluralism controlled by the National Progressive Front in 1972, which at first was formed by seven parties but whose composition constantly evolved. As a reward for their affiliation, its members were given positions and material advantages but could not carry out any real political activity.

Since his coming to power, Hafez al-Assad sought to weaken the two most powerful institutions in the country: the army and the Baath party. He promoted special units and

confined the Baath militants to surveillance activities of his entourage in exchange for favours. After his visit to North Korea in 1973, Assad also introduced the idea of monitoring society at all ages. Thus in 1974 he created the Baath Vanguard's Organization for primary school pupils. In secondary school, they had to join the Revolutionary Youth Union and, if their services were appreciated, they would be given higher grades to enter highly demanded university courses. This monitoring of society was not limited to youths: we find it in trade union life or women's organisations and always under the banner of what the regime called "people's democratic organisations".

A highly individualised and atomised politicisation emerged as a result of the culture of fear. From 1970 there was no longer any opposition but only opponents, disparate and scattered voices who lacked the means to come together or organise. Faced with the early uprisings in 1976, the regime made a decision to which it has firmly held: to stress the radical Islamist component in order to retreat into a confrontation that enables it to play the role of a "secular regime". In this climate, Syrian intellectuals were forced or almost forced to choose between three options: cooptation (grants, positions), corruption or exile. However, this exile did not give way to a truly structured opposition.

Despite the "unifying" and "progressive" discourses of the first period of the Baath party's reign (1963-1970), it must be noted that the confessional approach was one of the main pillars of the management of public life in general and political life in particular. One only needs to analyse the recruiting and dismissal movements that took place within the armed and security forces to understand the relatively discreet sectarian orientation of the leaders of the time (for more on that see chapter written by Florence Gaub in the same volume).

This political sectarianism and the exploitation of the confessional approach that appeared between 1963 and 1970 was systematised and institutionalised by the Assad family from 1970. Thus it was no longer belonging to a community that mattered most but rather allegiance to the leading class, the clan in power. This allegiance could comprise a heterogeneous mix of ethnic and confessional communities. What must be analysed is the fact that it is a minority of the power rather than the power of a minority.

## **Before 2011: Syrian Christians or Christians from Syria?**

Christians are at the centre of the concerns expressed by international bodies about the future of Syria. Although they do not by themselves represent all religious minorities in

the most basic numerical definition, they are nevertheless the catalysts for the prospects of minorities.

“I am proud of being Syrian and Arab. In contrast, I find it hard to encourage my son to continue on the same path (...)” A Christian father explains the resentment that spread among the community ranks in the years before the revolution<sup>1</sup>.

The Church leaders I was able to interview for a study<sup>2</sup> on the migration of Christians expressed their concern about this migration trends. For them, the most serious aspect is that Christians feel forced to leave the land that is the cradle of their religion. The official stances of the different churches must be analysed by taking into account their amicable relations with the political authorities, on the one hand, and their desire to avoid any discord, on the other. To justify their stance, the clergy stressed the qualities of the regime from their point of view: its “openness” to religious minorities, notably Christians, and the establishment of the necessary conditions for a “stability” that reassures the faithful in a troubled region. To understand this stance, we can speak of a “commitment” to the political power, showing “a submission to it that may become a sharing of interests.”<sup>3</sup>

Few religious Christian figures have opposed the regime or adopted a critical stance in an open way. The almost unconditional support for the political and economic measures adopted seems to be unanimous. This attitude is not exclusive to religious leaders but is also shared by much of Christian society, notably its wealthiest class, who were frightened by what had happened to their Christian neighbours in Iraq. Therefore, for many of them, the regime represented the last line of defence against radical Islamism.

In this context, it is worth pointing out that the internal movements of Christians from certain rural regions to big cities was mainly due to the lack of economic development of the country as a whole and, more specifically, of these areas. For the north-eastern region of Syria, one of the wealthiest in theory, where Syrians have always lived, there is also another factor that made them flee to other inland cities, notably Aleppo, and abroad, notably Sweden and Germany: Christians accused Kurds of having made them sell their farms at extremely low prices.

The Orthodox bishop of this region, Matta Rohom,<sup>4</sup> argued that the marks of the Ottoman period had never vanished. Thus, he accused Westerners of having always encouraged Christians to leave. The bishop considered that the West was responsible for the rise of

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1 Interviewed by the author in December 2006.

2 [http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/8269/CARIM\\_A&SN\\_2008\\_02.pdf;jsessionid=D405CF213C3473FC0136775FC6E1F374?sequence=1](http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/8269/CARIM_A&SN_2008_02.pdf;jsessionid=D405CF213C3473FC0136775FC6E1F374?sequence=1)

3 Father Paolo Dall'Oglio, head of the Monastery of Saint Moses the Ethiopian in the region of Damascus. He was expelled from the country by the government because of his commitment to peaceful revolution. He was kidnapped in April 2013 on his way to Raqqa, the capital of the Islamic State, when he endeavoured to start a dialogue with its leaders.

4 Interviewed by the author on 25 December 2006. He is currently in Sweden after having been prosecuted for his lack of loyalty to the regime.



fundamentalism in the region. “The French returned Khomeini to Iran, while Saudi Arabia, which adopts Wahhabism, is supported by the United States.”<sup>5</sup> In contrast, as was common among religious leaders, he referred cautiously to the weight of the security repression that may have encouraged some to go into exile.

The Catholic Bishop of Aleppo, Jean-Clément Jambart, explained his role within the community: “Our faithful are a minority and feel neglected. So they gather around the Church in search of guidance and support from the bishop. If the political power is democratised and transformed, perhaps our way of doing things will evolve but for the time being this is not the case.”<sup>6</sup> This same bishop who mentioned democracy is at present the spokesman for the Damascus regime and is successfully helping to restore its image in the West in general and in Europe in particular. For his part, the Chaldean Archbishop Antoine Odo<sup>7</sup> explained that Eastern Christians must reconsider their attachment to countries that are hostile to them. Why continue to envisage their existence in a country “that offers youths no more than uncertainties?”

In a debate on emmigration held in March 2006, five years before the popular revolt, Bishops Jeanbart and Odo debated the situation of Christians, crises and prospects. They endeavoured to emphasise the importance of remaining in the country. A participant highlighted an alarming statistic: in Syria in 2006 only 7% of Christians remained. They accounted for over 15% in the early 1970s. This figure was adjusted downwards by several members of the church who asked to remain anonymous: some said “we account for less than 3% of the Syrian population,” while others claimed “we are still above 5%.” The Catholic bishop in the region of Homs, Asidor Battikha, expressed his concern about how young Christians see this situation as they consider that “this land is not for [them], [they] don’t feel that [they] have a future here.”

As in Syria, Saddam Hussein instrumentalised Iraqi Christians. The situation of Christians in Iraq after the 2003 American invasion also made a strong impact on the Syrians. The Christians of Iraq were targeted by several attacks of the radical groups who considered them as close to the old regime. On their way to exile, they reached Syria with stories about how they were treated by radical Islamists, who destroyed their houses, killed their children, prohibited their prayers, humiliated their prominent citizens and blew up their churches. This caused increasing fear among Christians from Syria.

Thus a feeling of insecurity developed among Christians from Syria long before 2011. The future of Christians in the region was increasingly seen as dark and under threat. A deep-rooted fear emerged concerning the forms that the constant rise in religiosity took

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Interviewed by the author in Aleppo in November 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Interviewed by the author in Aleppo in November 2006.

among some Muslims. This was complemented by official propaganda that “sees Islamists everywhere” and seeks to make it believe that “fundamentalists”, “Wahhabists”, “Salafists” and “Takfirists” are ready to attack the state and society and, therefore, the only salvation would lie in subordination to power.

The “withdrawal” of ideologies as well as the weakening of secular currents, the abandonment of democratic experiences, the failure of attempts at socioeconomic development and the increase of fundamentalist movements are some of the factors that currently frighten Christians from Syria, or those who remain.

## Minorities, Myth and Reality

Prevalent among the strategies of the current regime in Syria are the exploitation of the religious question and the appropriation of minorities. The current Syrian regime uses increased control of the minorities and clientelist relations to impose on them total domination; the privileges granted to certain groups in exchange for their submission may involve sanctions for attempts at emancipation.

In order to better understand the situation of the “majority” and that of the “minorities” it is important to try to deconstruct several “founding” myths of the political rhetoric on Syria.

The first myth, widespread among certain Westerners, consists of defining the Syrian regime as secular. Hundreds of religious centres have been founded with a view to creating an official Islam following the example of the tight control exercised on the Church since 1970. This tendency became a reality after the regime managed to violently suppress the uprising of the Muslim Brotherhood in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Since then, it has kept religion away from the political sphere.

Reformist and enlightened currents had not well understood their place in this scenario. The regime systematically resisted all progressive initiatives within religion with the help of an “army” of submissive and manipulated religious people. These practices resulted in increased fragmentation within society long before 2011. Tribal, regional, community, confessional or religious identity became more important than national identity.

It is also necessary to deconstruct a myth widespread in the West that defines the Syrian regime as that of the Alawi community. As mentioned before, it is “a minority of the power

rather than the power of a minority.” The minority can be made up of Sunnis, Alawis, Christians or Druze who pay allegiance to this power. They are a minority in the political arena but even so they did not emerge from a single minority. Part of the Sunni middle class of Damascus, Aleppo and other cities, for instance, supports the regime and has benefitted from systematic corruption, smuggling and public markets for years. Its “survival” therefore depends on the durability of the system.

Finally, the third myth to be deconstructed is that of Christians. Christians are no more under threat than Muslims in Syria: all those who do not support Daesh are threatened, as are those who do not accept the stranglehold and repression of the regime. Syrians as a whole, whether Christian or Muslim, are caught in the crossfire. However, the scenes of organised jubilation within the Christian community after the retaking of East Aleppo by the regime in December 2016, at the cost of thousands of lives and tens of thousands of displaced people, will leave incurable wounds in the short term. Once again, the exploitation of Christian “fear” by an acute Machiavellianism has a very negative impact on all possible attempts at reconciliation.

## The Exploitation of the Islamist Argument

In the Syrian framework, and after a war that has lasted for six years, a question emerges: is there “a real Islamist danger”? Will the country inevitably head towards an Islamist fundamentalist system that must be nipped in the bud in order to ensure a constructive reconciliation?

Syrian conservatism is well rooted in the religious practices both of the country and the region. However, since the creation of the modern state and the foundation of a socio-political system inspired by the West with its ideological diversities, Syria has experienced a movement of secular reform and a school of thought that could influence a society highly marked by religion. Since the late 19th century, bold writings have addressed the religious question from three perspectives: interpretation, manipulation and recovery. Then, the political scene saw the creation of secular parties and the development of a “purified” spirituality independently of the political sphere. The 1940s and 1950s also saw a social and cultural development far from the religious field, although this was not its target.

This evolution enabled the establishment of a national platform, which brought together seculars and conservatives while agreeing on the principle of sharing and accepting the

other as he is. Later, in the 1960s and 1970s the progressive and liberal ideologies deeply marked society in spite of the authoritarian nature of the political system. The development, almost without religious taboos, of a wide range of artistic and literary production during this period is also related to this. Over those years, political Islam in Syria was embodied by the Muslim Brotherhood who in the 1950s had sat in the democratically-elected parliament, something rare in the history of contemporary Syria.

Violent confrontations put an end to this “cohabitation” in the Syrian political scene. Between the early 1960s and late 1970s, this political movement became the sworn enemy of the power of the Baath party. Later, the regime focused on the creation of an official Islam.

A clear revival of the demonstrative practice of faith is observed. The number of women wearing a veil grew exponentially in the years before the 2011 uprising, religious books had great success and the centres of religious studies increased. There was also a “violent” rise in religious expression in social and cultural practices.

Obviously, the regime, in search of legitimacy, let it happen and made concessions. The authorities had no fear of losing control of the phenomenon that they were trying to channel. Sermons were monitored but small mosques escaped these controls. Despite the hypothetical adoption of the principles of secularism in the discourse but never in laws, religious school textbooks were still virulent with a high dose of conservatism. Tolerance of other “sects” of Islam was minimal but, in contrast, was quite permissive of Christians.

The regime had started to emit its religious “radiance” beyond the borders. Indeed, talks and meetings on religious issues increased. The scientific and cultural institutions diverted their focuses of interest toward religious studies or, in the best of cases, they always found the necessary link between their activity and religious references.

The Muslim Brotherhood, in its turn, published in 2004 the “national charter for political action”, in which they reject violence and call for the protection of human rights. They mention the institutional modern rule of law, the separation of powers and pluralism at a political, ethnic and religious level.

One of its leaders, Mounir al-Ghadban, exiled in London, reassured Christians about a possible coming to power of a party that emerged from political Islam. He considered that the regime benefits from this climate of fear to convince Christians and Westerners

of securing its position and protecting it. This same leader stressed that the regime uses Islamists as a scarecrow and since then has been the refuge of all minorities. “The Islamic danger might devastate them: the hell of the regime is therefore better than the paradise of democracy.”<sup>8</sup>

In recent years, the abandonment felt by most Syrians sends some of the most desperate to the ranks of radical groups. In Aleppo, and during the siege in the last months of 2016 before its fall, the prevailing discourse among the population, whether religious or not, was that “we are damned because we are Muslims. Nobody worries about our situation because we are Sunnis (...).” Consequently, it is striking that some observers state that the Syrian revolution has been dominated by Islamists from the outset. The regime has understood all the benefits it could draw from the rise in radicalism by blowing on the embers of ignorance and obscurantism. Thus, on some occasions the regime and on others its regional “enemies” have done their best to ensure that radicalism is all-invasive.

In the West, the discourse according to which Bashar al-Assad’s regime would be the lesser evil has the wind in the sails today. Among entire sections of opinion, the Damascus dictator is seen as the final line of defence for minorities in general and the endangered Christian minority in particular. This perception is the result of a strategy that is yielding fruit: that of a regime that has always managed to skilfully focus on exploiting the division between the diverse components of Syrian society and use religion for purposes of domination. Far from protecting Christians, it has condemned them to their own fate. In a society in which freedom of expression and citizenship do not exist, the Assad family has begun by creating a complete religious hierarchy – both Christian and Muslim – under its thumb. The designation of muftis and bishops is subject to the approved of the all-powerful Syrian information services.

Some western chancelleries are increasingly moving to a “forced” rapprochement in order to be able to possibly cooperate with the regime on terrorism. Western public opinion is obsessed, on the one hand, with Daesh and, on the other, with the persecutions of minorities. Minorities are in danger, certainly, but no more than most of the population. With excessive coverage of their persecutions, we separate them from the other victims, which contributes to strengthening the feeling that they are apart and a privileged caste. In Syria, this was the objective of the regime: to divide the communities to control them better, even if this means setting one against the other.

We ponder the actions of Daesh and the situation of threatened minorities but never the struggles of the new civil society that represents all citizens without distinction. The media

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<sup>8</sup> Al-Ghadban, M. (2006, Novembre 26). Les chrétiens de Syrie : n'ayez pas peur de la démocratie sur votre destin dans la région. *levantnews*. Retrieved from [www.levantnews.com](http://www.levantnews.com)

also tends to marginalise the importance of the actions by young Syrians (the citizen journalists) who, with derisory resources and, at risk to their lives, continue to inform the world about the situation of the Syrian people, taken hostage between the loyal army backed by the death squads and the Jihadists of the Islamic States. It should be noted that these last few years have seen the emergence of a “true” civil society.

The four decades of dictatorship had almost destroyed the concept of civil society. The public space was taken over by the regime. By way of example, in March 2011, on the eve of the start of the revolt, there were around one hundred active civil associations, mostly charities, closely controlled by the regime. Today there are almost 2,000. Although many of them operate outside the territories for security reasons, they provide moral and material support to those who continue to resist there. The number of artists, writers, caricaturists, visual artists and creators that put their art at the service of this new society has exploded. A democratic movement is certainly underway despite the shortcomings.

## The Persistent Risk of Sectarian Division

The crystallisation of the confessional divisions and sectarian violence, whose main victims are the Sunni majority, is therefore one of the main threats to the region. Fighting against this phenomenon does not require a selective support policy, which would be in contradiction with European universalism, given the unprecedented level of violence suffered by the whole population.

Apart from the fact that it would not help to bring about democratic change, diverting attention from the crimes committed by the regime against the whole population, such a crystallisation would also be dangerous for the minorities themselves. By widening the gaps and fractures between the components of Syrian society, by stigmatising them based on their religious identity and by linking some of them to foreign interests, it would threaten their geographical, historical and social integration, the only true guarantee of lasting protection of these “minorities”.

The message sent to the religious “majority”, who consider itself the victim of Bashar al-Assad’s regime, would also be catastrophic and lead to pushing the desperate into the arms of Daesh. In short, by adopting in contrast the sectarian logic of Islamic State, we would risk giving it what it has not managed to acquire: a rooting in Syrian society. “The Syrian people are one” was just one of the first slogans of the revolution, based on a firm demand for social justice and equal rights to citizenship for all Syrians. Acting against

the sectarian or confessional crimes perpetrated by the Syrian regime, Daesh and the Shiite militias that are holding sway in Syria and Iraq involves understanding the responsibility of the states that promote them. It is paramount to defend citizenship, in contrast to the old colonial recipes based on the exploitation of local senses of identity and religious minorities.

If the populist and extremist trends developed in the shadow of social and economic crises in the West push decision-makers to fall into the trap, the price paid by all the protagonists will be high. This will breed, for example, an accelerated religious extremism, a steady mistrust among citizens and an increased rejection of the West.

After six years of conflict, the fear of an increase in sectarian division is gaining ground. The dangerous game by the authorities is sowing some seeds of doubt in the ranks of the “silent minority”, despite the fierce attempts by intellectuals of the opposition to try to explain this exploitation of religious differences and to raise awareness among society of the dangers of such manipulation. This manipulation that tries to link the protest movement with “Jihadist Salafism” sometimes manages to gain reticent minds in Syrian society but also in the diplomatic circles of some western chancelleries.

## Recommendations by Way of Conclusion

1. **Strengthen** the role of the emerging civil society: These last few years of suffering have seen the emergence of a “real” civil society, a concept that the four decades of dictatorship had almost annihilated. The public space was completely taken over by the regime. The Damascus regime had replaced the civil society organisations with “people’s” organisations following the example of practices developed in North Korea in order to monitor all sectors of society. Syrians who do not fear the division of the country organise themselves to ensure a peaceful and progressive transition, hoping that violence will end. They are convinced that their future is linked to their union. The new civil society will play a key role in the process of moral reconstruction after so many wounds and divisions. It will need powerful support, belief in its mission and backing for its fulfilment.
2. **Reconstruct** the education system on healthy foundations: After several decades when the school was the symbol of discrimination and submission, it is now time for the future generation to adopt the principles of citizenship. The first clash suffered by students is when they are obliged to separate between Muslims and Christians for

religious lessons. It is there where the rupture begins. It will be enhanced at home by parents who have suffered the same treatment. Therefore, it will be inevitable to revise the education system in depth, especially when lack of schooling is also a key challenge in Syria, with 3 million young Syrians outside the education system.

3. **Promote** a democratic culture to enable citizens to go beyond their primary identities (tribal, clan, regional, religious...) and mobilise to implement political and economic programmes in which these factors are no longer significant. The democratisation of public life in Syria “is not an external demand. It is a profound desire felt within.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, it is necessary to end the despotism that engenders discrimination, the deprivation of rights and the exploitation of the religious question engendering a minority dimension.

More generally, western countries must break with authoritarianisms; western support for these regimes is one of the reasons they persist. If the support disappears, the authoritarian regimes in the Arab world will be weakened.

4. **Managing diversity** in the region will be crucial in the next few years, and within the framework of reconstruction of the states or in the relations between the countries in the region. The catastrophic management of diversity adopted by dictatorships has given way to a fragmented society without real national identity.
5. **Transitional justice** is paramount to rebuild permanent social cohesion. Turning the page will only serve to bury the causes of the massacre under moving sands.
6. **Constructive national dialogue** between the religious and non-religious actors is needed on the preceding points so that the foregoing is adopted collectively to lead to tangible outcomes.

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<sup>9</sup> Father Paolo Dall'Oglio. See note 2.



# EuroMeSCo

Comprising 106 institutes from 32 European and South Mediterranean countries, the EuroMeSCo (Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission) network was created in 1996 for the joint and coordinated strengthening of research and debate on politics and security in the Mediterranean. These were considered essential aspects for the achievement of the objectives of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

EuroMeSCo aims to be a leading forum for the study of Euro-Mediterranean affairs, functioning as a source of analytical expertise. The objectives of the network are to become an instrument for its members to facilitate exchanges, joint initiatives and research activities; to consolidate its influence in policy-making and Euro-Mediterranean policies; and to disseminate the research activities of its institutes amongst specialists on Euro-Mediterranean relations, governments and international organisations.

The EuroMeSCo work plan includes a research programme with four publication lines (EuroMeSCo Joint Policy Studies, EuroMeSCo Papers, EuroMeSCo Briefs and EuroMeSCo Reports), as well as a series of seminars, workshops and presentations on the changing political dynamics of the Mediterranean region. It also includes the organisation of an annual conference and the development of web-based resources to disseminate the work of its institutes and stimulate debate on Euro-Mediterranean affairs.

## IEMed.

The European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), founded in 1989, is a consortium comprising the Catalan Government, the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and Barcelona City Council. It incorporates civil society through its Board of Trustees and its Advisory Council formed by Mediterranean universities, companies, organisations and personalities of renowned prestige.

In accordance with the principles of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership's Barcelona Process, and today with the objectives of the Union for the Mediterranean the aim of the IEMed is to foster actions and projects which contribute to mutual understanding, Exchange and cooperation between the different Mediterranean countries, societies and cultures as well as to promote the progressive construction of a space of peace and stability, shared prosperity and dialogue between cultures and civilisations in the Mediterranean.

Adopting a clear role as a think tank specialised in Mediterranean relations based on a multidisciplinary and networking approach, the IEMed encourages analysis, understanding and cooperation through the organisation of seminars, research projects, debates, conferences and publications, in addition to a broad cultural programme.



Global Political Trends Center (GPoT Center) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank established under the auspices of Istanbul Kültür University in 2009.

GPoT Center was founded with the aim to support reconciliation and non-violent solutions to international as well as domestic issues through dialogue. Our mission is to contribute to stability, democratization and peace through organizing multitrack diplomacy meetings, conducting innovative and independent research, and encouraging informed debates in the media on key issues affecting Turkey and the world.

GPoT Center serves as a platform for the free exchange of views and information on political, social and economic matters concerning a variety of parties and segments of society. We aim to achieve our mission by routinely bringing together opinion leaders, government officials, policy makers, analysts, scholars, experts and members of the media from Turkey and abroad.

Our publications can be downloaded from our website for free. They are also accessible through online libraries worldwide, such as the International Relations and Security Network in Zurich, Europe's World in Brussels, and Columbia University Press in New York. Additionally, you can find our books on Google Books and Amazon Kindle.