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STABILIZATION PLANNING IN SYRIA

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INTRODUCTION

Syria is entering its sixth year of debilitating violence at a moment of geopolitical flux. It has been and remains a crucible in the geopolitics of the Middle East; a flash point in great power politics; a source of extraregional instability; and a devastating human tragedy. Sadly, the international response to Syria has dealt with those aspects in that order, rather than prioritizing the human suffering.

Most analysts of civil wars believe that the approach to the Syrian civil war most likely to result in a sustained end to bloodshed would have the following elements: increased scale and coherence of Western engagement, in order to enhance Western leverage in negotiations with Russia and Iran; political negotiations that link international, regional, and local actors; the forging of an interim political deal—either a deal that sees President Bashar Assad leave power eventually, or at least one that limits Assad’s ability to execute violence against his opponents; and the installation of transitional institutions that can oversee interim security arrangements (including the disposition of Syria’s armed forces and intelligence agencies) and the beginnings of social reconciliation and economic reconstruction. These will be mammoth tasks, given the scale of devastation, destruction, and distrust.

The prospects for such an approach, however, remain dim. Indeed, given the current geopolitical dynamics, we do not believe an equitable negotiated settlement that removes Assad from power is possible. However, when Assad does eventually leave power, either through a pacted transition, an election, or eventual retirement or death, the international community may have an opportunity to guide Syria through a new negotiated political framework, allowing for a different set of stability measures and a robust reconciliation process.

In the shorter term, however, policymakers examining the real options for bringing Syria’s civil war to an end, or mitigating its destructive violence, must start with the following realities.

- *Geopolitical factors.* Unlike much of the experience of response to civil wars during the post-Cold War period, decisionmaking in Syria is heavily shaped by great power tensions and geopolitics—both within the Middle East and externally. That is to say, relations between regional powers and between Russia, Iran, the United States, and Europe are a decisive factor in shaping options for conflict mitigation or management. After a long period of deterioration, in part over debates about Syria, those relations are now in flux. The new U.S. president creates an opportunity for realignment with Russia over Syria, but the extent of that realignment, or its sustainability, is unclear. Particularly unclear is how President Trump might align his administration's desire for de-escalation and closer ties with Russia with its rising antagonism with Iran, which has been one of Russia's key allies in the Syrian conflict.
- *Ground realities.* The balance of forces and influence between outside actors and on-the-ground fighters always tilts in favor of local actors, but that is true in spades in Syria. Because the West's involvement has been patchy and limited, its influence with various opposition actors is also limited. The involvement of Turkish, Gulf, and other actors further fractures opposition loyalties. (This has waxed and waned; but as we note in the annexed paper on reconstruction, it is likely to *grow* under conditions of settlement.) Russia has a more direct tie to Assad and his armed forces but even there, influence is far from total; indeed, much of it is tied to Iran's presence, which arguably wields the greatest degree of external influence in Syria. All of this means that whatever agreements can be forged at the geopolitical level are unlikely to translate directly into changing conditions on the ground. Trust is non-existent, national institutions are shattered or profoundly weakened, and even under conditions of a so-called "victory" or a negotiated settlement, continuing violence (perhaps at a low level, localized) is likely to be a long-term reality for Syria.
- *Intrusive regional politics.* Regional actors have major stakes in the shape of Syria's postwar politics and security arrangements, as well as economic interests, and are likely to continue to provide support to their partners even if there is a political deal among major external actors. An international arrangement that fails to account for the politics of these actors is likely to run into substantial headwinds. Two major issues structure regional actors' views of the Syrian conflict. The first is a disagreement over the role that Iran will play in post-conflict Syria; the second is a disagreement over the primacy of preserving Syria as a unitary state with a strong central government, currently headed by Assad. Positioning on these two issues generates divergent priorities amongst governments who are all partners to the United States and Europe in both the Syrian negotiations and the anti-ISIS fight. These differences have frustrated the Vienna negotiating process, hampered cooperation in the fight against ISIS, and threaten to escalate the Syrian war further. It is thus imperative that any stabilization effort recognizes these disagreements and how they shape emerging coalitions within the region.
- *Reconciliation matters.* Even well organized, substantial, and savvy external support to political negotiations and physical security will falter if not accompanied, from the outset, by a scaled and sustained effort to foster local and national reconciliation. Building this into planning from the outset will be an important determinant of likely success. Furthermore, it is essential that reconciliation not be treated as a side pillar to economic reconstruction, political negotiations, or international security measures. Rather, reconciliation should be central to the design of those measures. Regardless of whatever outcome is achieved, it is worthwhile for the international

donor community to invest now in Syrian actors and organizations who can support future reconciliation, particularly at the community level.

The net result of all of these factors is that what are often depicted as alternate scenarios for the eventual reconstruction of Syria, are in fact points along a spectrum. And whereas the common scenarios examined for Syria refer primarily to the disposition of military forces on the ground, we believe it is necessary to construct scenarios by tying geopolitical and ground realities together.

1. GEOPOLITICAL AND GROUND SCENARIOS

Given recent political events, and the situation on the ground, the following scenarios appear to be the most viable for planning purposes.¹

1.1. *U.S.-Russia-Assad alignment: An Assad “victory”*

At the beginning of the Trump administration, and in the context of ongoing shifts in the U.S.-Russia relationship, it seemed feasible that we could see an emerging alignment between U.S. and Russian policy in Syria. This would entail a stronger U.S. prioritization of counter-ISIS efforts, as has begun under the Trump administration, and a willingness to accept Assad staying in power in Damascus; and it would entail Russia shifting from its current strategy of focusing its military efforts on defeat of the so-called “moderate opposition” to actually engaging counter-ISIS efforts. Should these two actors align in this way, it would leave Assad in power in Damascus with no major, organized political/military opposition. While this is still conceivable, recent developments including the April 7, 2017 cruise missile strike and the U.S. shooting down of a Syrian air force plane—and in the main, the decision of the Trump White House to shift implementation to the Department of Defense, which does not want reconciliation with Russia in Syria—make it less likely that we will see U.S.-Russian alignment in Syria, absent a broader shift.

This scenario does not entail a decisive military victory, but rather it is predicated on a sufficient succession of smaller wins coupled with the psychological and economic defeat of the armed Syrian opposition to force substantial numbers of them to surrender to Assad. In this scenario, backed by Russia and tolerated by the United States, Assad would gain enough territory from the Syrian opposition to allow him to command control over a sufficient proportion of Syria and would inflict enough damage on the Syrian civilian population to prompt acceptance of an Assad victory, as a preferable outcome to continued civilian death and infrastructure destruction.

However, even under this geopolitical alignment Assad’s forces are unlikely to be able to assert dominance and security throughout the country; they will encounter sustained resistance in several parts of the country, although none that poses an immediate threat to regime survival.

There are multiple possible roles for ISIS and other extremist groups in this scenario. First, the pro-government coalition could severely damage ISIS to the point of irrelevance.

¹ This paper builds on four previous papers, attached as appendices, which go into more detail on the challenges and possibilities for stabilization and post-conflict reconstruction: “Stabilizing Syria,” “International stabilization and peacekeeping in the Middle East: Balancing legitimacy and capacity,” “Attitudes of regional actors toward the Syrian conflict and potential outcomes,” and “Planning for reconciliation in a post-conflict Syria: Authoritarian legacies and lessons learned.”

More likely, ISIS will be significantly diminished within the Iraqi theater and under pressure in Syria to the point of shifting its focus to external attacks.

Accepting an Assad victory backed by Russia and the United States would confront European governments and the multilateral community with a difficult choice between reversing their stance on Assad and contributing to war termination and reconstruction, or standing apart from the United States on principle. Western governments will have to factor in the possibility of significant domestic distress and protest should they choose to work with or through an Assad regime.

Variation 1: Negotiated settlement. One variation of the above scenario is that the United States, Russia, and the relevant external powers decide to relaunch political negotiations on new terms. In this variation, we could still see a closer alignment between the United States and Russia but also the participation of a subset of opposition actors in a coalition or transnational government led by Assad or Assad-aligned actors.

Until recently, a negotiated settlement has been seen as the opposite scenario from an Assad “victory.” Under the new realities, rather, they are points along a spectrum that leave Assad in power and in partial control of the country.

Variation 2: American disengagement. A second variation of this scenario is one in which the United States simply decides that it has no particular stake in the outcome of fights over who controls Damascus, and sharply reduces its efforts to limit the scope of Russian action in Syria. Under this scenario, the United States would likely continue to focus on Syria as a counterterrorism priority and would work in a targeted way to eliminate ISIS strongholds, but would refrain from inserting itself into the political dynamics of the conflict. This would produce a very similar outcome on the ground, but with a weakened opposition, and diplomatically would be very different for international donors contemplating a role in reconstruction. A sub-variant on this scenario is one in which U.S. policy is oriented toward alignment with Russia but pressure on Iran—a stance which would require the U.S. to offer Russia substantial carrots in other theaters to break with Iran in the Syrian theater. There are those in and around the Trump administration who espouse this approach, and it has its adherents in the Gulf states; but the implementation of such a policy seems fraught and unlikely to succeed at least in the short term.

1.2. Scenario 2: Safe zones

The new U.S. president has sent signals that he is prepared to contemplate “safe zones” in Syria. As yet, it is unclear whether the president is determined to send substantial American ground troops to protect those safe zones, or whether he believes that it is possible (as others have mooted) for the United States to convince the Sunni Gulf Arabs to provide the relevant ground forces for these enclaves (perhaps with support from extraregional states, like Pakistan).² Ostensible promises of Saudi and other Sunni Arab ground forces have to be weighed against the reality of the ongoing entanglement of Saudi ground forces in Yemen.

² Pakistan’s unwillingness to provide military support to Saudi Arabia in Yemen, despite a direct appeal from Saudi Arabia’s leadership, as well as long-standing political, military, and financial ties between the two countries, raises some doubt as to its willingness to participate in a safe zone deployment.

It is also unclear whether the U.S. president believes that introducing safe zones in northern Syria could be done with Russian acquiescence, or over Russian objections. The United States alone or with its Gulf allies could decide to establish safe zones if they are willing to commit sufficient air and ground power to the operation—a very high-risk operation—or they can do so with some degree of Russian acquiescence. Under this scenario, the United States would take on a significant guarantor role with respect to the opposition and would reinforce and embed the current cease-fire with some degree of U.S.-Russia alignment. The Gulf states would be willing to provide financial backing to such an endeavor, and possibly even to contribute some air power or other forces, though that is likely to depend on their being a larger U.S. ground presence.

In contemplating this scenario, the administration will confront a series of complications. One is resistance in the U.S. Congress and the Department of Defense, which could frustrate the White House's attempts to engage the United States in another military conflict in the Middle East, that would most certainly result in the loss of American lives and treasure. This factor could increase the appeal of the United States making significant overtures to Gulf allies to share the burden.

Here, however, the administration will face a second complication: that the experience to date in Yemen of the Saudi armed forces (the region's largest armed force after Turkey) casts significant doubt on the ability of the Saudis or other regional actors to contribute an effective ground force to a safe zone absent a significant U.S. military presence on the ground.

In short: it seems unlikely that a substantial safe zone could be successfully established unless the United States is willing to provide the backbone military presence. An alternative is a wider cease-fire arrangement, at which point an international stabilization force of some description (see Annexes) could be deployed.

An immediate question is, in which enclave of anti-Assad territory would such safe zones be established? The largest and most cohesive of these is the largely Kurdish territory in the north and northeast. In this scenario, the international community would start the necessary military and political processes described below in this limited area, which would require less resources and Western political investment.

Although this scenario would require fewer military and other resources than the first scenario (at least initially), it inevitably entails a considerable number of other challenges. In particular, Western and Arab diplomacy would have to work hard to actively and explicitly mitigate the inevitable Kurdish influence over both the military and political aspects of this scenario, lest the entire venture be seen as a Western-backed Kurdish "conquest" of Syria. Failure to do so could provoke considerable opposition both internally and externally (from Turkey in particular) that might undermine the entire effort.

This scenario is not likely to last indefinitely. Unless the international community decides to help partition Syria, and the West and its Arab allies are content merely to have and hold the north, leaving the rest including the main population centers to be fought over by the regime and the various Islamist opposition groups, this scenario would probably have to evolve at some point into something very much resembling the first scenario.

The critical question facing Western governments and multilateral development banks in this scenario is the extent to which they are willing to support medium-term

development efforts in a limited territory with uncertain sovereign status. Unless there is a major reversal in Russia's position, which seems unlikely, Moscow would not support an international presence in Syrian safe zones, meaning that they would also block any effort to use U.N. Security Council (UNSC) resolutions to create interim sovereignty, administrative sovereignty, or similar in this safe zone, which would enable wider developmental support. More targeted support is possible, but would require creative legal decisions by development actors.

2. KEY FACTORS FOR CONSIDERATION

Any planning for the reconstruction of postwar Syria must put three political and security issues front and center: the disposition of regional actors; the likely need for an international force; and the critical issue of reconciliation. Economic or social reconstruction planning undertaken in the absence of these factors is likely to be subject to major reversals.

The importance of regional actors

Whatever happens in U.S.-Russia relations, there are several key regional actors that have direct stakes in the outcomes of political and military realignment in Syria, and it is unlikely that these actors will alter their perception of their interests in Syria just because of changing U.S. or U.S.-Russian policy. When planning for stabilization and reconciliation, it is essential to take into account the attitudes of regional actors.

While the Syrian conflict began with government violence against peaceful civilian resistance, regional governments quickly embraced various Syrian groups, and the Syrian civil war quickly became a proxy war between regional governments with clashing agendas and priorities. Regional non-state actors also found ready ground in Syria to advance their interests, and have likewise entered the war. Finally, military actors from outside the Middle East entered the fray beginning with American operations against ISIS in August 2014, followed by Russian military engagement in September 2015. Today, the Syrian conflict is fully internationalized both in theater and in its consequences.

Two major issues structure regional actors' views of the Syrian conflict. The first is a disagreement over the role that Iran will play in post-conflict Syria; the second is a disagreement over the primacy of preserving Syria as a unitary state with a strong central government, currently headed by Assad. Positioning on these two issues generates divergent priorities amongst governments who are all partners to the United States and Europe in both the Syrian negotiations and the anti-ISIS fight. These differences have frustrated the Vienna negotiating process, hampered cooperation in the fight against ISIS, and threaten to escalate the Syrian war further. It is thus imperative that any stabilization effort recognizes these disagreements and how they shape emerging coalitions within the region.

Although there are myriad regional-local axes on the ground, external actors can be thought of as falling into several coalitions.

- First, in the "Iran and Hezbollah in Syria" coalition, Iran is determined to keep Assad in power because Syria offers Tehran strategic depth and a channel of support to Hezbollah, its most effective regional ally. Hezbollah's investment in sustaining Assad has altered the geopolitical equation in the region in ways that suggest the potential for further escalation of conflict either inside Lebanon or with Israel.

- Second, the “no Iran, no way” coalition, which has Israel and Saudi Arabia as leading partners, believes Iranian supremacy is a concern that far outweighs the threat from ISIS—a perspective that presents an immediate and notable gap between Western and regional priorities in Syria, and one that has repeatedly put these governments at loggerheads.
- Third, the “no Assad, no way” coalition is a grouping of states that overlaps somewhat with the “no Iran” coalition, showing how Assad’s fate and Iran’s future role in Syria are inescapably linked. But the question of intention and priority is relevant. This coalition is led by Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, for whose governments Assad and Iran are inseparable.
- Fourth, the “strong central government” coalition comprises some regional actors, including opponents of Assad like Jordan and the United Arab Emirates and more neutral states like Egypt, that believe there is a critical need to preserve the Syrian central government in ending the Syrian war, even if it means keeping Assad in office for some time. This broadly aligns with the Russian position.

2.1. *The role of international peacekeepers*

Historically, wars end in one of two ways: outright victory by one side; or through a negotiated settlement. The former is less stable than often presumed, and is often accompanied by large-scale killings perpetrated by the victorious side.³ Negotiated settlements, though sometimes harder to achieve, have been more stable in the post-Cold War era than outright military victories.⁴ But these almost always need to be accompanied by a third-party force to help keep the peace. During the period from 1992-2012 when wars were declining steadily, the qualitative and quantitative scholarship on the issue demonstrated that the deployment of peacekeepers to support war termination was a critical part of why wars declined as consistently as they did.⁵ Many civil wars fall in between those two ideal points on the spectrum. But these almost always need to be accompanied by third-party military intervention to help keep the peace. In Syria, it is likely that the deployment of peacekeepers to support war termination will be critical to preventing the resumption of violence.

In the Syrian case, as in others, a core challenge for the international community will be in balancing legitimacy and capacity. The most capable military options for third-party intervention are not always the most legitimate, or vice versa. Particularly for interventions designed to support a negotiated settlement, legitimacy is a critical factor. However, send a legitimate but too weak force into a theater comprised of strong challenges and the risk of resumption of conflict will be high.

Broadly speaking, there are five options for the deployment of international forces into the Middle East, which can be blended: U.S. forces or a U.S.-led coalition; Russian forces;

3 Kenneth M. Pollack and Barbara F. Walter, “Escaping the Civil War Trap in the Middle East,” *The Washington Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (2015): 29-46.

4 World Bank, “World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development,” (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011) <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/4389:WorldBank>; “World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development,” (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2012) <https://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2012/Resources/7778105-1299699968583/7786210-1315936222006/Complete-Report.pdf>.

5 Virginia Page Fortna, *Does Peacekeeping Work? Shaping Belligerents’ Choices after Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); World Bank, “World Development Report 2011.”

NATO; the Arab League (or some other variation of an Arab/Islamic coalition); and the United Nations. U.N. deployments are possible if the U.S. and Russia realign around Syria, or if the United States decides to leave Syria to Russian strategy.

Because of U.S.-Russia tensions in the U.N. Security Council, the prospect of a U.N. deployment has been largely ignored to date. However, relative to the NATO, Russian, or U.S. options, the U.N. enjoys greater political legitimacy in the region and has the significant advantage of allowing for any combination of countries or regions to participate in the force—which would allow, for example, a force that blends Arab participation with Western heavyweights and extraregional neutral states. The U.N. also has an advantage in its relatively strong capacity for integrated military, political, development, and humanitarian operations—what it calls multidimensional peacekeeping. For all of the criticisms of the U.N.’s managerial capacity, in fact its integrated toolkit is substantially better organized than that of any other regional or international organization.

When referring to U.N. operations, there are two quite distinct modes in which it can operate: through its own management mechanisms, as in so-called “blue helmet” operations; or through its member states’ own mechanisms, in the form of U.N.-authorized multinational forces (MNFs). MNFs combine the political legitimacy of UNSC authorization with the logistical and fighting capacity of the advanced industrial militaries, and may be a relevant option for the Middle East.

2.2. *Planning for reconciliation*

Perhaps more so than any other task, designing and implementing a successful and comprehensive reconciliation process is essential to both ending civil conflict and preventing future violence. Traditionally, national reconciliation is intended to secure four goals: truth-seeking, redress of grievances, accountability, and institutional reforms. Often, those engaged in supporting reconciliation focus on the concept of transitional justice—ensuring legal justice (or rule of law); distributive justice (addressing structural and systemic injustices); and rectificatory justice (addressing violent crimes). Yet reconciliation involves more than accounting for the past—it is a complex process that seeks to change the normative framework of political leaders, former combatants, and individual citizens.

Reconciliation is also an ongoing and lengthy process. Even many years down the road, societies should not consider themselves “reconciled.” Rather, a successful reconciliation program must entail both short- and long-term measures. First, short-term, immediate steps should be taken to end conflict and establish institutional mechanisms to promote stable and effective governance. Second, long-term, generational steps should be taken to build momentum to move society over the tipping point wherein political actors, civil society, and everyday citizens are invested in the continued success of the transition, and preventing the resumption of violence becomes a goal deeply embedded within the national consciousness.

We are under no illusions that the reconciliation process in Syria will be easy. The destruction and devastation to human life, property, and infrastructure will take decades to repair. At every step of the way, there will likely be spoilers intent on undermining the reconciliation process, including self-interested political leaders, foreign governments, and ISIS and other extremist groups. The challenges facing Syria are immense, including the lack of central government control, the violent authoritarian legacy that marginalized and brutalized the majority sect, and the erosion of the social contract and ineffective governance that particularly affected young Syrians through poor education and

joblessness, the massive refugee and internally displaced person (IDP) population, and the legacy of intense sectarian conflict fueled by external powers as well as internal dynamics.

However, should Syria reach an eventual end to its conflict, there are several lessons from other reconciliation experiences that can be applied:

- Political will for reconciliation is insufficient to carry out a successful and sustained process without public buy-in (and vice versa).
- A process that allows victims and their families to air their grievances but does not name perpetrators, or provides them amnesty, is one way to walk the line between justice and revenge.
- Regardless of whether Assad remains in power, the international community should insist that he bless the reconciliation process, however superficially, to provide his supporters the political cover to participate in the process.
- When designing a reconciliation program, considerations should be made for abuses committed against individuals as well as groups and regions.
- International experts and civil society groups, with local partners on the ground, can play a crucial role in the early post-conflict days, or while a transitional government is in place, and can be drivers of the reconciliation process in the absence of effective government.
- In an asymmetric conflict, there is a need to take extra care to produce equality between groups during the reconciliation processes.
- It is important to prioritize transparency and documentation throughout the process.

Finally, it is essential that reconciliation not be treated as a side pillar to economic reconstruction, political negotiations, or international security measures. Rather, reconciliation should be central to the design of those measures.

The international community has had limited success in ensuring that reconciliation is built into reconstruction planning. This is in part because the dominant actors in postwar economic reconstruction are multilateral development banks (MDBs) that largely eschew a focus on the political dimensions of their engagement. At times, close U.N.-World Bank cooperation partially mitigates this weakness, but even when there has been close cooperation between political and economic multilaterals, the weight of the MDBs in operations typically far outstrips those focused on political negotiations and reconciliation, and the latter suffers in day-to-day execution.

If the situation in Syria, or in a safe zone in Syria, evolves in such a way as to lend itself to a multidimensional peacekeeping operation, this question can be addressed at the level of leadership. For example, if a U.N. or EU multidimensional operation ends up being deployed, the political leadership of that mission (special representative of the secretary-general, also known as SRSG, or equivalent) should have the authority to vet development actors' plans for economic reconstruction, with a view to effects on reconciliation, and a political team capable of performing that vetting. In this scenario, development actors could be mandated to undertake training on reconciliation prior to working in the theater (though such efforts in past instances have had modest results).

* * *

In what follows, we sketch how these various factors come together in the two broad scenarios described above. Again, we stress that many of the scenarios are points along a spectrum. There are two notional ideal-type outcomes that we believe have no prospects, and are not (at this stage) worth planning for: a genuinely inclusive political settlement that secures broad legitimacy and broad compliance, leading to a low-violence or even peaceful situation; and a genuinely decisive victory by Assad and Assad-allied forces, leaving the government in full control of the entire Syrian territory. Given the evolution on the ground over the past year and recent political events, every credible scenario in front of us is a variation of a reality in which part of Syria is roughly controlled by Assad and his backers, with no major threat to regime survival, and other parts of Syria are either lawless and disordered, or under international protection. The boundaries of Assad-dominated (but not peaceful and not “controlled” Syria) and those areas where Assad’s forces cannot meaningfully dominate may shift over time.

3. SCENARIO 1: ASSAD-U.S.-RUSSIA ALIGNMENT.

Stabilization measures and the role of international peacekeepers

This paper does not recommend stabilization measures that would encourage an Assad/Russia “victory,” or extend Assad’s semi-control over a larger swathe of Syrian territory. However, given that this is a likely outcome of the Syrian conflict, it is important to address what stabilization might look like under such a scenario.

In this scenario, perhaps ironically, we are more likely to see U.N. involvement, given potential U.S.-Russian re-alignment at the U.N. Security Council. U.N. peacekeepers or U.N.-mandated multinational forces could be deployed to parts of Syria under this scenario to help bring an end to violence and produce great stability and trust in areas where fighting has dimmed. This would be more likely to succeed if it took the shape of a multinational force or modified MNF (like the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon, or UNIFIL II), rather than a traditional blue helmet force. However, it may prove difficult to recruit militarily capable Western or Gulf forces to participate in such an effort, notwithstanding U.S.-Russian re-alignment.

Should Assad be left in control of the government in Syria, and the largest external powers align with him, it is clear that Russian forces would play a more prominent role than in a negotiated settlement that removes Assad from power. In either scenario, Russia is likely to maintain some level of involvement, but Russian concerns will take prominence in an Assad-dominated outcome.

While no one would look back on the Kosovo operation as a model of international stabilization efficiency, the fact of the matter is that in a hotly contested geopolitical space, the structures established for Kosovo allowed for a substantial reduction of violence in Kosovo itself and the diplomatic, rather than military, management of the conflict over the issue between the U.S., Europe, and Russia. The parallels to Syria are significant.

The long game of reconciliation

Should Assad and his supporters end up with the dominant hand in Syria, reconciliation will be extremely difficult with the chances for a return to conflict high. Syria under Assad

was a minority-run autocratic regime. Ever since the 1970 coup that installed Hafez Assad (Bashar's father), Syrian Sunni Arabs and Sunni Kurds have understood the government as working to keep them subservient to the Assad family and the minority Alawi sect they represent. This sense of marginalization was only reinforced by the 30-year Syrian-Iranian alliance, which put Syria under the influence of the region's largest Shiite country, one ruled by a revolutionary Islamist and actively proselytic clerical elite.

Thus, this scenario would likely result in a highly angry and demoralized Sunni population, some of whom may seek revenge against the state. Additionally, the large and growing gulf between pro- and anti-Assad Syrians, regardless of their religious sect, will also result in angry non-Sunni, but anti-Assad Syrians under this scenario. Furthermore, as other conflicts have shown, in order to agree to take part in reconciliation and take responsibility for the crimes committed during a conflict, a party must feel sufficiently disempowered—i.e. they have no better options left. Thus, should Assad and his forces be victorious, he will not likely be motivated enough to engage in any serious reconciliation process that would hold him and his supporters accountable for acts carried out either prior to or during the civil war. And Assad's foreign friends, particularly Iran and Russia, may act to further instigate Syria's deep sectarian divides by giving Assad cover for his potential failure to allow for a serious and fair reconciliation process.

In this scenario, the best possible reconciliation agreement would provide some sort of judicial amnesty to combatants on all sides who renounce violence and agree to some sort of reparations for victims—either financial or symbolic. Also essential would be a paring back of the role of Syria's intelligence services. Here it is key to avoid the scenario of a return to strict authoritarianism, coupled with a top-down, symbolic reconciliation effort that provides no justice for victims, as occurred following the Algerian civil war. Although not ideal, the process could anonymize perpetrators, as was the case in Morocco.

The Moroccan case is instructive for Syria on many levels. First, it managed to walk the line between revenge and justice. Morocco's Equity and Reconciliation Commission (ERC) was not given the power to name individuals as guilty of committing abuses, rather it could only name institutional abusers. This did not satisfy all Moroccans—some of whom took part in a parallel NGO-led effort that named perpetrators—but it did allow Morocco to move forward and could be applied to the Syrian case under an Assad victory. A criticism of the Moroccan approach is that the ERC did not have statutory powers to require state agencies to comply with its recommendations. It therefore served solely an advisory role. This is not surprising in Morocco's political context (wherein the king retains veto power over all decisions). In the case of Syria, a successful reconciliation process should include some sort of mechanism to ensure the commission's recommendations are enshrined in law, particularly in the case of an Assad victory, in order to allow Syria to move forward and ensure a serious, substantive reconciliation process.

The international community should work with the reconstituted Assad government—while recognizing the likely limits on its influence—to incentive him to not replicate the asymmetric, minority-led government of the past. Two options that might limit the resumption of tensions are (a) variations on the Lebanese confessional system, which would ensure some degree of fair representation of Sunni Arabs and Sunni Kurds within the Assad-led government, and/or (b) a decentralization process. The latter will be particularly important, and donors should focus heavily on locally based reconciliation processes that allow victims within individual communities to achieve at least a modicum of justice.

The Iraq case highlights the importance of establishing political credibility within the national reconciliation process, which will likely be at risk in this scenario. Iraq's reconciliation process is overseen by the National Reconciliation Committee, with a direct line to the Iraqi leadership via a reconciliation advisor to the prime minister. However, Iraq's current prime minister, Haider al-Abadi, has been criticized for lacking the necessary political support to carry out reconciliation.⁶ While Abadi has demonstrated a desire to prioritize reconciliation, there are questions as to how genuine this is, and he has been sidetracked by more pressing security and economic challenges and is plagued by the poisonous sectarian atmosphere left over from the prior government. Furthermore, it is very difficult for a top-down led reconciliation process, in a country still grappling with tremendous sectarian cleavages, to gain the necessary buy-in from all parties. In Syria this challenge will be even greater, particularly under an Assad victory.

Lustration will also take on greater importance under this scenario, as the “losers” in the civil war should not be expected to follow orders from or otherwise be ruled by perpetrators of atrocities from the prior regime. The key to successful reconciliation under Scenario 1 is for those within the international community with any influence to make clear to Assad and his inner circle that without undertaking minimal reconciliation efforts including national and local dialogues and some form of airing of grievances or accounting for the past, Syria will quickly return to bloody civil war. Of course, given events on the ground, external, especially Western, influences on Assad may be limited, at least in the short term.

The role of regional actors

A U.S.-Russia alignment in support of Assad will directly threaten the interests of some of the most powerful regional actors. A deal that keeps Assad in power, regardless of the level of U.S. enthusiasm, will anger Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. These three states, aligned, could complicate a U.S.-Russia deal, particularly should they bring Israeli support with them. The role Israel plays in supporting or spoiling a U.S.-Russia scenario will depend, in part, on whether Iran is actively involved the U.S.-Russia alignment or playing a more behind-the-scenes role.

Iran will also complicate U.S. involvement more directly. While Tehran is the regional power most likely to support a strong Russian role and prefers to keep Assad in power, the U.S.-Iranian relationship is complex at best. At this early stage, the Trump administration appears intent on challenging Iran, or “putting Iran on notice” regarding its adherence to the 2015 nuclear deal (called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA).⁷ While the United States may want, or need to work with Iran to achieve its goals in Syria, it is hard to imagine the Trump administration undertaking any action that would have the effect of cozying up to Iran. Furthermore, U.S. domestic pushback, particularly from Congress, will complicate even the most basic U.S.-Russia-Iran partnership in Syria. Finally, we should not underestimate the level of potential U.S. and European domestic pushback against a U.S.-sponsored arrangement that affirms Assad's continued control over Syria. Large numbers of Americans are likely to continue

6 Ben Connable, “Iraq Reconciliation Requires American Help,” *The National Interest*, May 4, 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/iraq-reconciliation-requires-american-help-16059>.

7 Carol E. Lee and Michael C. Bender, “Trump White House Puts Iran ‘On Notice’ After Missile Launch,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 1, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-white-house-puts-iran-on-notice-after-missile-launch-1485979767>.

to oppose the U.S. entering into an agreement with Russia that keeps Assad in power. If this scenario were to play out while the Trump administration continues to attempt to block Syrian refugees from entering the United States, there could be significant public outcry in the United States and in Europe. This factor may not change the U.S. government's calculus, but must be considered in stabilization planning.

4. SCENARIO 2: A SAFE ZONE

If Western or Western-backed actors decide to establish a safe zone in northern or southern Syria, a different set of roles for international peacekeeping and reconciliation efforts arise. As the fighting produced swathes of liberated Syria, an international team headed by a special representative of the U.N. secretary-general with experience in post-conflict reconstruction could move in to begin administering the territory and organizing a new political process from the bottom up.⁸ Additional personnel from various international organizations and NGOs could also be brought in at this point to assist with humanitarian relief and eventually assist in transitioning toward longer-term socio-economic development. Negotiations in parallel would attempt to hammer out a new power-sharing agreement to create a political framework to secure the gains won by the new opposition army on the battlefield.

One alternative to the first scenario would be to extrapolate instead from current circumstances by supporting and expanding existing enclaves of moderate opposition in Syria. The largest and most cohesive of these is the largely-Kurdish territory in the north and northeast. In this scenario, the international community would start the necessary military and political processes described above in this limited area, which would require less resources and Western political investment.

Although this scenario would require fewer military and other resources than the first scenario (at least initially), it inevitably entails a considerable number of other challenges. In particular, Western and Arab diplomacy would have to work hard to actively and explicitly mitigate the inevitable Kurdish influence over both the military and political aspects of this scenario, lest the entire venture be seen as a Western-backed Kurdish "conquest" of Syria. Failure to do so could provoke considerable opposition both internally and externally (from Turkey in particular) that might undermine the entire effort. This scenario would also require a level of Gulf financial and military commitment that may be hard to obtain.

Peacekeeping in a safe zone

If there is a space within Syria where the West or a Western-Arab coalition seeks to establish stability, and can do so absent interference from Russia and Assad, then a range of more ambitious measures are possible, albeit within limited territory. The most ambitious such arrangement would require the following elements:

- A high-level political body, modeled along the lines of the Bosnia Contact Group, to provide top-level international support, including from the region. This would have to include key Sunni states.

⁸ We should note that the head of the UNHCR has publicly opposed safe zones, as proposed by Trump, due to the complexity of the landscape. See "UN Refugee Chief Opposes 'Safe Zones' in Syria," *Voice of America*, February 3, 2017, <http://www.voanews.com/a/un-refugee-chief-opposes-safe-zones-in-syria/3706013.html>.

- A powerful core force provided by a Western nation with high-order capability (perhaps Australia or a similar actor).
- A blend of Western, Arab, and high-end international forces (e.g. Pakistani).
- A highly capable political team with substantial civilian assets.
- An over-the-horizon support and extraction force with air assets sufficient to extract personnel (not necessarily equipment) in a matter of days.

If, as seems more likely, any transition plan is met with substantial opposition from a subset of actors on the ground, then even the most robust, well-managed U.N. peace enforcement operation will be unable to cope. In this scenario the only actor capable of imposing stabilization, and even then with geographic limitations, is the United States. A U.N. force or political mission could be deployed to a part of territory that has first been stabilized by a U.S.-led force (multinational force or coalition). Similar mechanisms to those listed above would still need to be applied in these circumstances.

If the territory under consideration is limited, some of the challenges of employing U.N. peacekeeping forces can be mitigated. Still, given the inflamed tensions in the region, the regional proxy dynamics, and the tendency of the various sub-state and non-state parties to make a political and even a targeting issue of U.N. personnel's religion or regional identity, at the very least it would be wise to create an additional political mechanism that could buttress the SRSG and bolster her/his legitimacy. Three mechanisms have been used in the past for this purpose, and could be useful here, with the right composition (regional states, non-regional Muslim states, and major donors).

- *Groups of friends.* The most frequent mechanism for allowing governments to interact with the U.N. on a country hosting a peace operation is a “group of friends,” or some variant of it such as the International Committee in Support of the Transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). A study for the Center on International Cooperation in 2006 noted that such mechanisms had been involved in a majority of post-Cold War peacekeeping cases. However, the utility of different groups to different missions has varied widely—and the members of these groups are usually distinct from troop contributors to the relevant missions, although there have been exceptions including in Haiti and Sierra Leone.
- *Higher-level political conferences.* In cases where long-term peace operations require political attention and ongoing negotiations to maintain force levels, member states can facilitate talks through regular conferences such as the “Two Times Seven” talks on Haiti (a process that brings together the deputy foreign and defense ministers of seven Latin American troop contributors twice a year to discuss, *inter alia*, the future of the mission). A similar mechanism: The EU convened a special session of the European Council with then-U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan to discuss forces for Lebanon in 2006. The political convening power of such events helps increase public political clarity over the goals and needs of peacekeeping, and conveys to the parties on the ground that there are high geopolitical costs associated with attacking or otherwise undermining the operation.
- *Formalized oversight bodies.* This has been done in two cases. One was in Bosnia, where the head of the mission reported not to the U.N. Security Council but to the Peace Implementation Council, a constellation of 55 countries comprising all the

relevant outside actors. The contact group has no prior legal existence but was simply the designated entity for the management of the Bosnia operation. A second, perhaps more applicable case, is the occupied Palestinian Territory, where the U.N. political mission operates with the support of (not reporting to) the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for Assistance to the Palestinian People (AHLC). The AHLC is comprised essentially as a donor body, and meets both in capitals at the foreign minister level and in-country at the ambassadorial level. All of the major Arab states are present, as are the European donors, non-European donors (e.g. Japan), and the United States and Russia. Membership is, effectively, by contribution. The AHLC is serviced by a joint secretariat comprised of the U.N. and the World Bank, which gives it a capacity to coordinate assistance activity on the ground, and gives the U.N. and the World Bank an ability to report on economic, humanitarian, and, to a limited degree, political issues to a wider and more senior body than the UNSC. At various points in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and negotiations since Oslo, the AHLC has been used as a forum to quell tensions, generate political support for the U.N., and generate funds for reconstruction activities.

Planning for reconciliation

Reconciliation will occur primarily at the local level under this scenario. Under the type of safe zones that the Trump administration has proposed, where thousands of Syrian refugees return to their homeland, it will be crucial for the international community to support small reconciliation programs within refugee camps and communities prior to their return to Syria. Successfully re-integrating refugees back into Syria will require a thoughtful process that allows victims even the most superficial opportunity to document their abuses and air their grievances before returning to 'normal' life.

The role of regional actors

This scenario would be embraced by some regional actors – particularly those with large Syrian refugee populations, such as Lebanon and Jordan, who are eager to return Syrians to their home territory. Most regional actors could likely be convinced to support a safe zone strategy as a temporary path toward long-term stability. For the members of the anti-Assad and anti-Iran coalition (Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar), while this scenario does not actively attempt to remove Assad from power, it also does not bless his continued rule. Thus, most regional states could potentially get behind some form of safe zone with a strong U.N. presence. The danger for this scenario is if it begins to evolve into a partitioning of the country into regional zones of influence. Here, we are likely to see the regional dynamics discussed earlier in the paper play out in full force as regional powers (particularly Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar) try to cement influence over parts of the Syrian territory. The recent breakdown in relations within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the emergence of a Turkey-Qatar-Iran link in response to the Saudi/UAE pressure on Qatar will increase the scale and intensity of competition inside Syria.

CONCLUSION

Planning for stabilization in Syria under the current geopolitical and ground realities will fall along a spectrum of partial to less partial instability. As the new U.S. administration undertakes a re-examination of its relationship with Russia, we may see a U.S.-Russia realignment that both allows Assad to remain in power and provides a modicum of

stability to allow for serious reconciliation measures. However, this scenario will be confronted by a complex regional landscape with several potential spoilers, intent on preventing the ascendance of Iran and the continuation of Assad rule.

A second scenario—establishing safe zones or a single safe zone in northern Syria—will provide ample opportunities for multilateral peacekeeping forces and will likely be more amenable to regional players. This scenario is not without its own complexities—particularly bringing sufficient Gulf resources on board and convincing the U.S. Congress and American public of the benefit of entering into another Middle Eastern conflict.

Regardless of where Syria falls along the stability-instability spectrum in the short-to-medium term, the international community must begin now to seriously think through the dynamics of reconciliation, the role of international peacekeepers and how to mitigate the potential negative effects of regional players along the way. Only if these political and security factors are front and center in planning can there be a realistic plan for economic and social recovery of Syria.

APPENDIX ONE

JUNE 2016

INTERNATIONAL STABILIZATION AND PEACEKEEPING IN THE MIDDLE EAST

BALANCING LEGITIMACY AND CAPACITY

BRUCE JONES

INTERNATIONAL STABILIZATION AND PEACEKEEPING IN THE MIDDLE EAST⁹

Between 1992 and 2012, large-scale civil wars (those that kill more than 10,000 persons a year) declined by 80 percent. Now, though, that decline in conflict has been reversed in the Middle East and North Africa. Not all new wars are in the Middle East, of course, but 85 percent of global battle deaths since 2012 have been in that region. Put in empirically but not politically correct terms, 90 percent of all battle deaths since 2012 have been in Muslim-against-Muslim fighting.

FIGURE 1: BUBBLE MAP OF BATTLE DEATHS, 2014



It has become vogue to debate whether we are in the Thirty Years' War or the Hundred Years' War in the Arab Muslim world. Notwithstanding the tenuousness of these historical parallels, there is little doubt, from historical patterns of how wars start, spread, and end, that we are in for a long period of violent conflict and political reordering in the

9 The views expressed in this paper are those of the author alone. Sections of this paper draw in part on a parallel analysis of stabilization options in Syria by Kenneth Pollack.

Middle East. Yet all wars ultimately do end, some sooner than expected, and we should be prepared when they do. What's more, even as violence endures, we may confront opportunities to help stabilize pockets of territory and population.

Historically, wars end in one of two ways: outright victory by one side, or through a negotiated settlement. The former are less stable than often presumed, and are often accompanied by large-scale killings perpetrated by the victorious side.¹⁰ Negotiated settlements, though sometimes harder to achieve, have been more stable in the post-Cold War era than outright military victories.¹¹ But these almost always need to be accompanied by a third-party force to help keep the peace. During the period between 1992-2012 when wars were declining steadily, the qualitative and quantitative scholarship on the issue demonstrated that the deployment of peacekeepers to support war termination was a critical part of why wars declined as consistently as they did.¹²

This paper explores what set of third-party military options may be available in the Middle East, and discusses how they might best be configured—in broad terms—to meet the political requirements of current conflict mitigation in this complex region. It does so by examining the key facts from the history of peacekeeping in the Middle East itself, as well as from broader lessons about conflict mitigation. (A cognate paper for this project by Kenneth Pollack provides a more granular look at how U.S. and U.N. action can help stabilize Syria under a variety of scenarios.)

At its core, the challenge in Syria will be in *balancing legitimacy and capacity*. The most capable military options for third-party intervention are not always the most legitimate, or vice versa. This is not particularly salient if planning for interventions designed to back one side toward total victory, but that is a risky undertaking at the best of times, and seems unlikely to emerge as the dominant strategy for civil war termination in the Middle East. For interventions designed to support a negotiated or partially negotiated settlement, legitimacy is a critical factor, though not sufficient on its own. Send a legitimate but too weak force into a theater comprised of strong challenges and the risk of resumption of conflict will be high.

The contemporary history of the Middle East suggests that war termination, conflict management, and stabilization will ultimately be a function of both U.S. strategy and U.N. action, with European and Arab institutions playing important secondary roles. Of course, this requires an eventual U.S.-Russian détente on Syria, but that is quite feasible under a range of scenarios.

If geopolitical decisions do pull Syria toward the U.N., the organization will be unprepared. The debates at the U.N. today are all about how the organization can avoid being pulled deeper into the maelstrom of today's Middle East, especially in terms of playing peacekeeping roles where terrorist organizations are present—as they are in 100 percent of conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa. So this paper devotes considerable attention to the multiple potential forms of U.N. interventions—ranging from political missions to robust peacekeeping operations and multinational forces. These are a far more varied and capable policy instrument than is commonly understood.

This is warranted even if ultimately U.S.-Russia relations preclude U.N. action. Of all the organizations that have experience with peacekeeping, the U.N.'s experience is by far the most varied and flexible. It offers a number of lessons for how to structure third-party intervention in the Middle East. Should institutional politics preclude U.N. deployment, and regional politics

10 Kenneth M. Pollack and Barbara F. Walter, "Escaping the Civil War Trap in the Middle East."

11 World Bank, "World Development Report 2011"; World Bank, "World Development Report 2012."

12 Virginia Page Fortna, *Does Peacekeeping Work?*; World Bank, "World Development Report 2011."

preclude a NATO or EU deployment (which I think is likely), and therefore ad hoc coalition structures are used, it would be wise for leading governments to design those interventions against the various U.N. models explored in this paper.

An important note: when examining past experiences for lessons for upcoming options, one does not look for ideal outcomes or successes; these are few and far between in the history of international conflict management. The correct bar is not a perfect success or even a stable peace. The bar is: a broad reduction in violence; the beginnings of political dialogue and incipient institutions; some recovery of economic activity and reduction of barriers to humanitarian access. Even a frozen conflict is a better outcome than a brutal active one. As we will see below, the most important conflict management experiences in the Middle East have been in southern Lebanon—hardly a mecca of peace and stability, but a far, far cry from the tension and violence in the region, in part because of innovative and moderately effective international political and peacekeeping interventions.

It is also important to stress that few wars are decisively settled in a matter of two to three years. Genuine stability tends to come over the course of a decade or more. When settled wars are left unattended by their international guarantors, they tend to relapse into violence, requiring new rounds of negotiation and peacekeeping. International peacekeeping and development planners should be envisaging 10-year engagements as a realistic timeframe—even if their political masters do not want public discussions framed in those terms.

Finally, it should be noted that unlike some situations in sub-Saharan Africa or in secondary conflicts in other regions, where the U.N. itself may be the locus of strategy formation, in the Middle East the reality is that the United States is likely to be the decisive factor in shaping strategy for conflict management options, in some form of dialogue with European and regional actors. The U.S. debate is complex, but some reasonably clear lines of strategy are emerging for the various civil wars in the Middle East. Brookings's Kenneth Pollack, writing in the *Washington Quarterly*, has outlined his assessment of the likely credible course for U.S. strategy in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen, which provides a reference point for this. How much these strategies will change under the next U.S. administration is unclear: an initial assessment suggests a reasonable degree of continuity, but there will almost certainly be a more forward-leaning stance on the (still limited) use of U.S. troops as a stabilizing tool for Syria, and potentially—but far from certainly—a heavier military strategy under Donald Trump. This would change the basis for political negotiations with Russia.

A terminological note: outside of the U.N., the deployment of international forces to help produce peace and reduce violence is referred to as stabilization. The U.N. norm has been the deployment of forces after violence has been brought to an end through political negotiations—and the term “peacekeeping” typically denotes this kind of deployment. In between is the fuzzy concept of “robust peacekeeping,” undertaken when violence has diminished but not ended. These terms are the subject of fierce political, doctrinal, and ideological debates but in reality are simply points along a spectrum, with greater levels of violence requiring larger and more capable forces to be deployed to deter or quell it. Throughout this paper I use the term “peacekeeping” to refer to this entire spectrum of operations. The term “political missions” refers to civilian deployments without troops, though in some cases we have seen political missions that are accompanied by armed guards.

1. THE DEPLOYMENT OPTIONS

Broadly speaking, there are five options for the deployment of international forces into the Middle East—and they can be blended. Each has advantages, and each has considerable problems associated with it, and we have to understand both to think through the balancing of capacity and legitimacy.

U.S. forces, or U.S.-led coalitions. First and most commonly debated is the unilateral, or quasi-unilateral, deployment of American or American-led coalition forces. This is obviously the option that comes with the most potential firepower and it may be the only option available in some circumstances, for example if there is an effort to stabilize Syria or parts of Syria in the absence of an agreed settlement (see Kenneth Pollack's paper for this project). U.S. forces can deploy relatively rapidly (exceedingly rapidly in modest numbers), have extensive intelligence capabilities, and a logistical capability that is unmatched globally. The challenge for U.S. forces is a political one—i.e. potential rejection in the Arab world of U.S. unilateral action.

It is worth noting, however, that the *purpose* of the force appears to alter the degree to which this is a factor. To wit, the deployment of American forces to overthrow Saddam Hussein in 2003 was widely rejected internationally and in the Arab world as an unlawful and illegitimate act despite the fact that the U.S. was able to argue that it was deployed under U.N. Security Council authorization. By contrast, the U.S. made no effort to secure UNSC authorization for the deployment of its counter-ISIS forces, and yet no part of the political spectrum in the Arab world or internationally has rejected that deployment on legitimacy grounds.

Russian forces. Only Russia can deploy similar levels of force into the Middle East. But Moscow would encounter all of the same problems of perception as U.S. forces, or more so, especially in Syria where its forces are already deployed in defense of the massively unpopular Assad regime.

A U.S.-Russia détente on Syria seems likely in the coming period, under either one of two scenarios. First is a U.S.-Russia accord in diplomatic talks. Second is a significant uptick in U.S. strategic engagement in Syria by the new U.S. president, which would give the U.S. substantially greater leverage in its negotiations with Russia. This could produce a détente or at least a Russian willingness to not veto U.N. action. Of course, it could also produce an escalation of direct tensions via proxy in Syria—but this too has often been a precursor to U.N. deployments, as escalating tensions between the U.S. and Russia (or the Soviets) has on several occasions triggered U.N. deployments—precisely because the two powers seek to limit the escalation, and because the U.N., unlike any other organization, allows for the Russians to keep their hand in the operation and structure alongside Western forces.

Ultimately, however, Russia may insist on being part of the deployment of any international force. In this regard, it is worth remembering that Russia deployed alongside U.N.-mandated NATO forces in Kosovo in the early stages of that peacekeeping effort, and although there were early points of tension, Russian and NATO forces quickly settled into an imperfect but stable relationship in different parts of Kosovo. Given the geopolitical context in which Middle Eastern conflicts are unfolding, this may be a germane experience.

NATO. Theoretically, NATO could be a deployment option for the Middle East—it has the strength, operational sophistication, and geographical proximity to lend operational credibility to the option. NATO has also shown the flexibility to allow non-NATO countries to

participate in its operations, notably the United Arab Emirates (in Afghanistan). That may be a critical flexibility in terms of creating the option of a mixed Arab and non-Arab force for deployment into Middle Eastern conflicts.

NATO has two important weaknesses in this regard. First is the lack of an integrated structure that combines the military, political, and development strands of action. Despite endless debate on this point since the launch of Afghan operations, NATO has not really progressed on the development of an integrated capability. Second is political. The points made above about the non-linearity of regional responses to U.S. forces could potentially apply to NATO as well, but there is little appetite in the Arab world for NATO's presence. When the U.S. sought regional support for a NATO deployment to southern Lebanon in 2006, for example, that option was roundly rejected by Arab foreign ministers, in favor of a U.N. option. NATO would be unlikely to be seen as a legitimate source of impartial force in Yemen, or even in Libya.

Arab League or Arab coalition. In international policy discussion there is much focus on regional organizations as the necessary answer to both the unsustainability of large-scale U.N. operations and the growing tendency for regional actors to assert primacy in the management of conflicts in their own region. This would suggest a need to look at the Arab League as a potential source of action or at least legitimization of peacekeeping operations in the region. It is notable that Arab League endorsement of the coalition action against Moammar Gadhafi was cited at the time as an important source of legitimacy, and specifically cited by Russia and China in their decision to abstain in the UNSC vote on the Libya action, rather than vetoing it.

The Arab League (LAS) has also acted politically, in both Syria and Iraq, in both cases in tandem with the U.N. The monitoring mission deployed into Syria in the first phase of that war was a joint U.N./LAS operation, though the U.N. carried 100 percent of the operational elements of that mission; the LAS provided part of the political leadership and had a dual reporting line with the U.N. That may have helped make it politically palatable to the government. But it is also germane that the mission had minimal, if any, impact on the course of the conflict.

The Arab League, however, has two major weaknesses. It has no operational capability and no experience with contemporary peacekeeping—its only operational role was in the wake of the Lebanese civil war in the 1980s, and that League operation was a fig leaf for the Syrian occupation of Lebanon. Second, it is riven by political difference. Major and sustained disputes and struggles for prominence between Saudi Arabia and Egypt have historically made the League unable to serve as a political platform for much of anything.

Recent tensions within the GCC make an Arab coalition more unlikely; rather, they raise the likelihood of deeper Arab (and Arab-Turkish-Iranian) competition within Syria.

United Nations. Although the Arab world and the world-formerly-known-as-developing have grown more vocal in their criticism of an unreformed U.N., there is little doubt that when political circumstances align, the U.N. enjoys greater political legitimacy than any of the other options for outside forces. It also has the significant advantage of allowing for any combination of countries or regions to participate in the force, allowing for example for a force that blends significant Arab countries' participation with Western military heavyweights and extraregional neutral states. The U.N. also possesses a significant advantage in having a relatively strong capacity for integrated military,

political, development, and humanitarian operations—what it calls multidimensional peacekeeping. For all of the criticisms of the U.N.'s managerial capacity, in fact its integrated toolkit is substantially better organized than that of any other regional or international organization.

Contra the conventional wisdom, the U.N. also has very effective command and control arrangements—at least, it does when the states participating in a peacekeeping operation are militarily capable. It does not have the intelligence capabilities of NATO, but these can easily be supplied to the U.N. through adjunct mechanisms (i.e. the Strategic Military Cell used in Lebanon—see below.)

The U.N.'s weaknesses are two-fold. First, its logistics and budget mechanisms are lumbering and cumbersome. Only if member states provide their own logistics or loan their logistics to the U.N. (as when then the U.S. airlifted troops into the U.N. operation in the Central African Republic) can the U.N. deploy rapidly. Second, over the past 15 years, since Bosnia, advanced militaries have largely stayed out of U.N. operations, meaning that the U.N.'s operational reputation is shaped by its experience in fielding operations comprised largely of Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and African forces, many of which have proven brave under fire but do not carry with them advanced military capabilities. But the U.N. is a straightforward system: what you get out depends on what you put in. Look back to the longer history of U.N. peacekeeping, especially the period when countries like France, Canada, and Holland were significant contributors, and it is evident that the capability can be significantly greater than is the current reputation of the U.N.

A final point here may be particularly germane: and that is that the U.N. can operate in two distinct ways: through its own management mechanisms, as in blue helmet operations; or through its member states' own mechanisms, in the form of U.N.-authorized multinational forces. MNFs combine the political legitimacy of UNSC authorization with the logistical and fighting capacity of the advanced industrial militaries, and may be a highly relevant option for the Middle East.

Hybrid operations (and the variants thereof). Any given operation can in fact draw from several of these options simultaneously, or in parallel. So-called “hybrid” operations are now more common than operations mounted by one organization alone. They come in three distinct varieties:

- *Sequential operations.* For example, a U.N.-mandated multinational force (INTERFET) deployed to deter and end violence in East Timor in 1999 before handing off to a U.N.-managed force (UNTAET). In an example of good practice, the lead nation for INTERFET, Australia, took over the core of the UNTAET force and the force commander position, meaning that UNTAET had considerable force capacity of its own.
- *Parallel operations.* For example, the U.N. and NATO deployed in parallel in Kosovo, with NATO providing the military arm of the international presence and the U.N. (together with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, or OSCE, and the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees) providing the civilian/political, economic, and humanitarian components. Coordination between these operations was mandated by the UNSC and took place through regular interactions between the NATO force commander and the U.N. SRSG.
- *Integrated operations.* For example, the U.N. and the African Union (AU) have a genuinely integrated operation in Somalia, where AU forces are deployed via U.N.

logistics and U.N. funding, and with dual reporting to the two organizations. Broadly this has been seen as an excessively cumbersome option, but it has allowed AU forces to conduct far more extensive operations than they otherwise would have been able to.

Summing up. My assessment, from simultaneously studying the evolution of international peacekeeping and conflict management and intervention in the Middle East, is two-fold. First, that despite the ongoing severity of the Middle East's wars and the high likelihood that these will continue, morph, and even intensify, that there will be pockets of stability and moments of opportunity and need, from eastern Libya to Yemen to northern Syria and western Iraq.

Second, that regional sentiment will largely preclude NATO from deploying into the region, and that geopolitical competition will—in a way ironically, but consistent with the historical pattern—pull decisions toward the U.N., and thrust the U.N. into conflict management and peace operations roles in the region that it does not now imagine nor want. Looking across the region:

- The U.S. will have to carry the major operational role in Syria and probably western Iraq—explorations of options that don't look to a U.S. role on the ground tend to be exercises in fantasia. But even there, the U.N. will likely be pulled into a supporting role—either sequentially, if the U.S. decides to take on a role in stabilizing Syria or part of Syria, or in parallel if the U.S. leads a coalition to deploy in the context of a negotiated settlement.
- In Libya, a U.N.-mandated multinational force would likely be the most effective option, though the U.S. may also deploy ground forces from a counterterrorism perspective.
- Yemen is the place that would be most amenable to a U.N. role, either in monitoring or even in multidimensional peacekeeping.
- Given increasing instability and U.S. hesitation, we could see a shift in arrangements in the Sinai away from the ad hoc Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) to a more sustained role.
- Given the tenor of current political debate, it also makes sense to highlight political missions—but also to highlight that the alignment between circumstance and structure that allows for an unarmed political mission to make a constructive difference to war termination or peace implementation is *exceedingly* rare.

2. THE U.N. OPTION: HISTORY AND ISSUES

Should circumstances push peacekeeping options toward the U.N., a big part of the debate will be around the role of U.N. peacekeeping in confronting transnational terrorist organizations—which are now present in roughly 60 percent of contemporary wars, and all wars in the Middle East and North Africa. In its first generation, peacekeeping was a tool for managing interstate war, primarily in the Middle East. In its second and third generations, it was a tool for managing internal wars, in conflicts that emerged from the Cold War and in the wave of wars that swept Africa in the 1990s and early 2000s. In these wars, it was by definition a tool used to manage conflict between a state actor and a non-state actor, or several non-state actors, many of which controlled substantial

amounts of territory that they sought to govern. It has become vogue to refer to the “new” phenomenon of non-state actors controlling territory, but this is ahistorical: from Biafra to southern Sudan to northern Cambodia, the U.N. and other international peacekeepers have long confronted non-state actors in control of territory.

2.1 Can the U.N. handle the Middle East?

Still, there are four distinguishing characteristics of wars in the Middle East that will make peacekeeping harder than has been the norm over the past quarter century:

- **Size and sophistication of the state’s armed forces.** U.N.-mandated and U.N.-managed forces have combated states’ armed forces before, but rarely ones with the scale and sophisticated weaponry of the average Middle East state. The majority of Middle East states have large and well-equipped armed forces—although their coherence and battle-readiness is notoriously weak. Only in Indonesia has a U.N.-authorized force confronted an army of the size and sophistication of Syria’s, for example, and there the United States and the U.N. Security Council used the threat of diplomatic and economic sanctions to compel the Indonesian authorities to withdraw their forces from areas where the U.N. was to deploy, and “consent” to the U.N. mission presence (first INTERFET then UNTAET).
- **Sophistication of non-state forces.** The political and military excesses of the American war on terrorism over the past 15 years have created a deep hesitation in the U.N. to be party to any military action against terrorist entities. In principle, though, there is no *a priori* difference between a rebel group and a terrorist entity—both use force illegally to threaten a government and attack civilians. What distinguishes contemporary Islamic insurgencies or defined terrorist groups is (a) their technological sophistication and (b) their ability to reach back to member state countries to execute attacks on other countries’ civilians on their home soil. This raises both the requirements for operations and the political stakes for contributors. (This issue is also bound up in a debate about the implications of shifting from the status of a non-combatant impartially enforcing a peace, to the status of a combatant seeking the defeat of one party to a conflict—a perfectly legal step for the U.N., but one with military and political consequences.)
- **Powerful friends.** Almost all non-state forces currently active in the Middle East have or acquire external patrons—for political support, weapons, money, rear bases, and safe havens. And there’s no difference of principle between a situation where the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) has Liberia as its patron and one where a Syrian rebel group has Qatar as its patron—but there is a real world difference. The financial and diplomatic clout of the patrons of Middle Eastern wars is substantially higher than has been true in the vast majority of wars into which the U.N. has been thrust in recent decades. And what’s more, some of these conflicts have further U.S.-Russia overlays, which both further complicates the situation on the ground—though it may ironically hasten a turn to the U.N. to serve as a buffer for potential U.S.-Russia hostilities.
- **Divided regional organizations.** The reasonably positive experiences of collaborating with the EU in southern Europe and with the AU in parts of Africa have made it popular to refer to the important role of regional organizations in managing conflict. And indeed the Arab League has been invoked on two recent occasions—as part of a political mechanism to manage parts of the Iraqi reconstruction, and as part of

the chemical weapons eradication mechanism in Syria. But to imagine that the Arab League is capable or competent to mount peace operations is to dabble in fantasy. The Arab League is riven with regional geopolitical competition, and even if it could reach a decision to take concrete action, it has no infrastructure through which to do so. And the GCC is a defensive alliance aimed at Iran, not a conflict management mechanism. Unless there is a substantial rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Egypt on regional politics, it is not likely that there will be a regional option for the Middle East.

- **U.S.-Russia tensions in the U.N. Security Council.** Whereas U.S.-Russia tensions, and to a lesser degree U.S.-China tensions, are a reality of any conflict setting, since the end of the Cold War both powers have broadly been willing to go along with P3 (the U.S., the U.K., and France) efforts to establish political missions and peacekeeping operations, reserving their leverage for imposing tactical constraints. Syria has of course been different; U.S.-Russia tensions have at times blocked UNSC action. Of course, the U.S. and Russia did align to allow the U.N. political mission, and then the U.N.-Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) chemical weapons mission. Geopolitical dynamics will have to shift if the U.N. is going to end up being deployed in a more serious way in Syria.

It is tempting to say that a further distinction is Arab nationalism and anti-Western sentiment. However, almost all regions exhibit strong nationalist sentiments during periods of crisis, and anti-Western sentiment is far from confined to the Middle East. Still, the depth of anti-Western sentiment in the Arab Muslim world is an important reality that will shape the options for international peacekeeping and stabilization. What is more, Arab publics are extraordinarily sophisticated about the U.N. and its relationship to the great powers, even if state-owned newspapers peddle in conspiracy theory. Any U.N. official who has served in the region has had the experience of civil society groups and popular demonstrations confronting them with detailed parsings of the nuanced differences between UNSC, U.N. secretary-general, and U.N. agency statements on, *inter alia*, the Palestinian issue, Arab-Israeli issues, and terrorism.

On the positive side, the Middle East has two characteristics that will aid operations. One is geographical proximity to European ports, which can significantly ease the logistics of mission deployment. The second is high geopolitical salience to the world's top military powers, which has historically meant that peacekeeping operations in the Middle East have been able to draw on a far stronger pool of contributors than have operations in sub-Saharan Africa. Any peace operation in the region will also be able to draw on high-level political attention and relatively flush funding that would be the envy of operations deployed in Africa.

This is salient because just as peacekeeping, robust peacekeeping, and stabilization are a continuum, so to is the force required to implement different mandates under different models. Simply put, the larger the fighting power of the participants to the conflict, the larger the necessary fighting capacity of the intervening force. Recent experiences (for example in southern Lebanon and Mali) have shown that when sophisticated armies deploy within U.N. operations, those missions can deter attacks and maintain escalation dominance on sub-state actors and local armies. However, less capable forces, including less capable contingents inside otherwise sophisticated missions, are susceptible to substantial attack. The scale and sophistication of the intervening body has to match the challenge on the ground. This is a challenge for the West, which has over the past

decade and a half shied away from military roles in U.N. peacekeeping, leaving such missions to troops from less developed countries (and then being surprised when the operational capacity of the U.N. is limited).

2.2 Modes of U.N. deployment

Against this backdrop, we should explore the multiple ways in which the U.N. can deploy in theater. The term “peacekeeping operations” connotes the deployment of forces under blue helmets, but in fact the U.N. has undertaken third-party deployments of a wide range of types. These include:

- **Parallel civilian/military deployment.** A political/civilian structure working in parallel to a non-U.N. military structure (e.g. the U.N. mission in Kosovo).
- **Bespoke political mechanism.** The UNSC has also in the past authorized the creation of a bespoke political mechanism to oversee political, civilian, and military action by other institutions—e.g. the UNSC authorized the Contact Group and high representative for Bosnia, which oversaw NATO military operations and EU economic/civilian operations.
- **Mediation missions.** Standing missions devoted to mediation are suitable for the best and worst cases that face the U.N.: (a) those where there is a high level of consent and chances for mediation are good, reducing the need for military deterrence; (b) cases where consent is absent and violence so high that peacekeeping is not a viable option, yet there is a need for some sort of political channel (as in the early days of the Syrian war).
- **Civilian observers or mediation missions with protection.** Where civilian observation may be sensible but conditions are insecure, it may be possible to deploy a civilian observer force with a light military capacity to protect the observers. The experience of the U.N. Guards in Iraq (see below) is germane here. A further variant of this is civilian observation with over-the-horizon protection forces—as with the OSCE’s Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM), which was backstopped by a U.S.-managed over-the-horizon force. As that example showed, civilian observers cannot halt deterioration in a situation, but they can provide the international community with real-time information about the situation on the ground. Over-the-horizon options may be particularly salient in the Middle East, given its relative proximity to NATO bases and European ports.
- **Military observer missions.** Military observer missions are the oldest tool in the U.N.’s operational toolbox. This option is often treated as outmoded—and the negative experience of the U.N. Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) shows its limitations. But military observation (armed or unarmed), sometimes alongside civilian/electoral observers and political mediation, can be a flexible, lightweight tool, as in the Nepali case and the Joint Military Commission in the Nuba Mountains of Sudan (2002-05), which successfully covered 80,000 square kilometers with just 20 uniformed personnel. But, as the recent Nordic mission in Sri Lanka attests, military observers alone cannot forestall a return to conflict.
- **Police observation/training and rule of law missions.** In cases where public order is a recurrent problem, it is possible for the U.N. to deploy police training/monitoring missions—an option used by the U.N. in Haiti and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the late

1990s, and more recently adopted by the EU in the Balkans, DRC, and Afghanistan. The creation of the joint U.N.-Guatemalan Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CIGIC) to investigate illegal security groups and promote the rule of law points to the potential utility of rule of law/police missions in countries where there is no need for a peacekeeping presence. Mechanisms like this have preventive potential: if a state requests U.N. support in developing or bolstering its police or rule of law capacity, providing support can help prevent the descent into violent conflict. There are formal obstacles—such as questions over the necessary legal and institutional basis for such support—and capacity limits here, but it is a useful part of the toolbox. This could be relevant for countries like Algeria and perhaps even Tunisia that have not experienced large-scale conflict yet but are exhibiting serious signs of internal stress while attempting to navigate political transitions.

- **Logistical support for and oversight of national police/military capacities.** International forces or police are often called upon when the state cannot or will not deploy its own capacities to protect civilians. When the question is capacity rather than will, one option is supporting the state to deploy its own capacities, and monitoring their performance against international standards. This mechanism was used in refugee camps in eastern Zaire in 1996, when the U.N. supported (logistically and financially) the deployment of Zairian Presidential Police into refugee camps (Zairian Camp Security Contingent), with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) providing monitoring on civilian protection. The current U.N. mission in Chad similarly involves a mix of international and national units designed to provide security in refugee camps and related areas. (In addition to providing training and mentoring, the U.N. is paying stipends for the unit and facilitating its outfitting with basic police equipment.) This could be salient in Libya or Yemen, or perhaps even in parts of Syria or Iraq, following more robust stabilization missions.
- **International observation of regional deployments.** One of oddest missions the U.N. has ever deployed was UNOMIG—the U.N. Mission of Observers in Georgia. Why odd? Because what the U.N. forces were observing was a Russian/Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peacekeeping force deployed into the region with UNSC authorization. In other words: a regional hegemon pushed for and got authority to deploy its forces into Georgia ostensibly for stabilization purposes, but as a condition for authorizing this, the UNSC insisted on co-deploying international observers who would monitor the behavior of that force, limiting at least in theory the possibility and propensity for human rights and other abuses by the outside presence. This model could be a precedent if, for example, Saudi or Turkish forces seek authority to act in a neighboring country.
- **Preventive deployments.** The U.N. has only authorized one preventive deployment in its history—in Macedonia in the 1990s. Nonetheless, the Security Council should not preclude repeating this successful experiment in future cases where there is evidence of looming conflict and reason to believe it can be deterred by an international presence. One can imagine the potential for this form of deployment in several sensitive cases in the broader Middle East, where interstate tensions are high. Arguably the U.S. deployment of Marines close to the Syria-Jordan border constitutes exactly one such preventive deployment, albeit without the trappings of UNSC authorization.

- **Member state-supported blue helmet operations.** The reinforcement of UNIFIL in summer 2006 was undertaken through the fusion of assets managed by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and direct member state implementation (in terms of deployment, logistics, and strategic management—through the Strategic Military Cell, or SMC). This had the advantage of allowing member states with advanced logistics capabilities to deploy rapidly to the field, while not requiring any one of them to lead the MNF alone—which would have been politically challenging in the Lebanese context, as well as potentially straining for any of the participating nations, all of whom were simultaneously heavily deployed in Afghanistan, Kosovo, and elsewhere. The speed, scale, and sophistication of the deployment diminished the necessity of using force—the deployment itself changed the calculation of forces on the ground (as did quiet negotiations with Hezbollah in advance of the deployment).

2.3 Some background on U.N. peacekeeping in the Middle East

U.N. peacekeeping is predominantly associated with sub-Saharan Africa, but it may be useful to remember that the U.N. has a long and complex history of operational roles in the search for peace and war termination in the Middle East. Indeed, international peace operations were born in the Middle East: In the first months and years of the U.N., the Middle East was a laboratory for innovation—the first humanitarian agency, the first mediator, the first political mission, and the first U.N. observer force were all forged against the anvil of the early Arab-Israeli wars. In the 1950s and 1960s, great power conflicts played out in the region both directly and through proxies, and when proxy conflicts threatened to escalate into direct confrontation, the U.S. and the Soviets on several occasions turned to the U.N. to deploy observer or peacekeeping forces to help de-escalate the conflicts. This generated still further innovations, namely the first large peacekeeping operations. Then in the 1980s, U.N. peacekeeping was wrecked against the shoals of Arab-Israeli tensions. Other non-U.N. operations followed.

Over 70 years, the Middle East has been host to myriad peace operations. A brief recounting of them serves three purposes: it reminds us that U.N. and international peace operations have frequently (though not recently) been a major part of how conflict management in the Middle East has been approached; it highlights the range and variability of international operations, underscoring a theme that will be important in the period ahead, to wit the enormous flexibility of the U.N. and the international system, notwithstanding its reputation; and it provides a set of precedents to refer to in the debates that will come, precedent being a useful legitimating device in U.N. debates.

- **Count Folke Bernadotte.** Bernadotte was the U.N.'s first mediator, deployed to the Middle East in 1948 to help secure a cease-fire and end of hostilities between Israel and the combined Arab invasion force. His assassination by terrorists (in that case, Jewish extremists) set an ominous precedent, but one only rarely invoked. It is striking by today's norms to recall that Bernadotte was deployed simultaneously under a U.N. and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) imprimatur.
- **U.N. Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO).** UNTSO was conceived as a light, unarmed force that could observe and report on the implementation of the Arab-Israeli truce of 1946, famously negotiated by Ralph Bunche and implemented by Brian Urquhart. That UNTSO still exists today, observing a cease-fire line that has not existed for almost 50 years, is testimony to the U.N. bureaucracy's ability to

overcome minor inconveniences like the ends of wars. But UNTSO also serves as a repository of logistics and observers for other missions in the region, with logistical reach into Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt, with a rear base in Israel.

- **U.N. Emergency Force (UNEF) I.** The first genuine peacekeeping force created by the U.N. deployed into the Suez after the end of hostilities in the Suez crisis. An entertaining historical note is that the mission was forged over U.K. objections by dint of the U.S. using a procedural maneuver to take the issue out of the hands of the UNSC, and into those of the UNGA. UNGA Resolution 1001 established the U.N.'s first real peacekeeping operation, the U.N. Emergency Force. This force of over 6,000, which included troops from Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, Finland, India, Indonesia, Norway, Sweden, and Yugoslavia, deployed within 48 hours to the Sinai Peninsula. In its organizational form, UNEF I was much more similar to what we would now call a multinational force than to contemporary peacekeeping operations.
- **UNEF II.** Israel was rocked in the early days of the Yom Kippur War by a swift and forceful attack from Egypt, Jordan's decision to join the campaign, and an effective Syrian assault on Israel's northern flank. Within days, Israel's armed forces were on their heels, and Israeli supplies of heavy armor and equipment were wearing thin. It was only through an emergency airlift of supplies from the United States that Israel was able to regain its military footing. Once it did, however, the balance in the field swung rapidly and decisively to Israel's favor, such that within a short period Israeli troops had crossed the Suez Canal and were threatening the road to Cairo; and in the north, they were marching on the outer suburbs of Damascus. By this time, the Soviets were frantically seeking a cease-fire, before their client states' armies completely collapsed. Faced with the collapse of the Egyptian and Syrian armies, the Soviets signaled to the U.S. that the two great powers should solve the situation together, or the Soviets would have to do so themselves—in effect, threatening intervention. Given the stakes, Kissinger flew to Moscow to negotiate directly with his counterpart, and then the U.S. and Soviet ambassadors met in the U.N. Security Council. From these negotiations emerged an agreement eventually encoded in Resolution 338: termination of hostilities by the parties; recognition of Resolution 242; and agreement to convene, under appropriate auspices, negotiations designed to establish “a just and durable peace in the Middle East.” Over the following days, the UNSC further specified the terms of the Israel-Egypt truce, and called on the secretary-general to deploy observers along the Israel-Egypt cease-fire line, the so-called UNEF II operation.
- **U.N. Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF).** In a similar fashion, the U.N. Disengagement Observer Force deployed along the Israel-Syria line of separation in the Golan after the 1973 war. Notable by today's norms is the length of its authorizing resolution—a full three paragraphs. UNDOF remains in place; it was an important stabilizer along the Syria-Israel border until 2012, when the civil war in Syria began to threaten UNDOF troops.
- **U.N. Observation Group in Lebanon (UNOGIL).** In January 1958, Lebanese President Camille Chamoun called for a UNSC meeting to complain about United Arab Republic (UAR, the brief political union of Syria and Egypt between 1968-61) interference in Lebanese domestic affairs, a call supported by the U.S., France, and the U.K. (and Israel), but ultimately blocked by the Soviet Union. Following rising tensions,

on July 15, 1958, the U.S. deployed Marines into Beirut to protect Chamoun. On the same day, the UNSC created a three-person observer group in Lebanon, later increased in size by then-Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld. The U.S. Marines would withdraw on October 25, 1958, and UNOGIL would withdraw by the end of November 1958. This was surely the smallest, least known, and most irrelevant peace operation in the U.N.'s history, listed here only for the sake of completeness.

- **UNIFIL I.** After the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon in 1978, the parties requested the establishment of a line of separation of forces, more or less following the line of the Litani River. UNIFIL deployed several thousand lightly armed forces into southern Lebanon with a separation of forces mandate. Over 20 years UNIFIL interpreted its mandate in a very conservative fashion and played a minimal role at best in managing conflict on the Israel-Lebanon boundary: not forestalling Hezbollah penetration; not forestalling Israeli penetration; and ultimately not preventing the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war. After this, though, a retooled UNIFIL II became a much more interesting operation, explored in detail below.
- **MFO Sinai.** The Multinational Force and Observers Sinai were deployed to help secure the eastern Egyptian province and the border with Gaza, after the withdrawal of UNEF II due to a vote in the UNGA. By this point in time, Arab-Israeli tensions in the U.N. and anti-U.N. sentiment in Israel precluded a U.N. option. MFO Sinai endures to this day, but is under new pressure from the ISIS affiliate in the Sinai, and U.S. budget pressures.
- **Operation Desert Shield.** It is too commonly forgotten that the 543,000 troops deployed to Saudi Arabia in 1991 to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation were formally a U.N.-mandated multinational force operating under U.S. leadership. Though it is highly unlikely that this scale of force will be deployed to deal with any of the contemporary Middle Eastern conflicts, it is important to remember that the U.N. can be used in this fashion: as a political platform for very large-scale military operations. The U.S. provided the bulk of these forces but Saudi Arabia, the U.K., and Egypt also provided substantial contributions. Other participating nations were: Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, Greece, Honduras, Hungary, Italy, Kuwait, Malaysia, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Niger, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Senegal, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Syria, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates.
- **Operation Provide Comfort (northern Iraq).** Also U.N.-authorized was the deployment of forces to northern Iraq to defend the Kurds against Iraqi attacks in the aftermath of war. This mission was salient for the adoption of UNSC Resolution 661—the first to reference an internal conflict as a threat to international peace and security. It was this resolution that opened the legal pathway to the wave of internal U.N. peacekeeping operations that followed.
- **Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH).** The Temporary International Presence in Hebron was established under the diplomatic initiative of the U.N. special coordinator for the Middle East peace process, after the Hebron massacre. TIPH provides a light, unarmed monitoring presence designed to help maintain calm in that tense city, but its track record is mixed at best.

- **UNIFIL II.** After the Israel-Hezbollah war of 2006, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice sought regional and international support for the deployment of a NATO operation to southern Lebanon. This was overwhelmingly opposed. The second option was to strongly reinforce the U.N. mission on the ground, UNIFIL. Thus was born UNIFIL II—the genuine exception to all other U.N. operations in the region—and an innovative mechanism that, alongside the Office of the U.N. Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL), warrants a fuller discussion (below).
- **U.N.-OPCW special operation in Syria.** A short-term and bespoke operation established on the basis of U.S.-Russian negotiations and with the joint organizational support of the U.N. and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the mission succeeded in removing a large portion (though not all) of the Assad regime’s chemical weapons from the theater. The arrangement was operated with the consent of the Syrian state and armed forces.

Of course, the U.N. is also involved in another operation that is germane for this discussion: the peacekeeping and stabilization operation in Mali. This has generated substantial analysis and debate—especially around the question of the U.N. deploying in a context with a large prevalence of terrorist organizations. The most salient points are these:

- In Mali we see a U.N. “robust peacekeeping” operation deployed partially in parallel and partially in sequence with a French-led multinational force. The political framework for both missions is unusual in that it specifically targets a transnational terrorist organization. This has generated a great deal of political unease at the U.N. among member states, including troop contributors and the Secretariat, who are fearful of being caught with the consequences of helping implement a U.S. or P5-led war on terrorism. In practice, some limited counterterrorism tasks have fallen to the U.N. peacekeeping operation. The presence in that mission of a strong Dutch contingent has meant that, despite the Secretariat’s fears, the U.N. operation has been able to handle those tasks, maintaining a serious deterrent against ISIS in the Maghreb (ISIM) and maintaining escalation dominance over them as well. Of course, ISIM has attacked and killed members of other troop contingents.

2.4. Contemporary political missions

“Special political missions” (SPM) are a modern bureaucratic and budgetary construct of the U.N. Secretariat, but civilian political deployments have been an arrow in the U.N.’s quiver almost from its first days. And like most other operational tools of the U.N., they were born in the Middle East. It is simultaneously inspiring to read about the first U.N. special political mission, under Count Folke Bernadotte, replaced by Ralph Bunche, who together laid the groundwork for the first cessation of hostilities at the end of the first Arab-Israeli war, and dispiriting to read contemporary accounts of the bureaucratic challenges, logistical obstacles, and headquarters-field mission divide that they encountered, almost all of which remain intact to this day.

Since 1948, the U.N. has fielded just under 50 special political missions or sizeable mediation operations, ranging from Iran-Iraq to Nigeria-Cameroon, Myanmar, and El Salvador. To date, there has been no comprehensive or even systematic study of where or under what circumstances political missions have been successful. There is a long list—from Afghanistan during the Taliban to Sudan, Sri Lanka, and East Timor—of political missions that precede large-scale violence: that is to say, these were mediation

missions deployed into an unstable context and then withdrawn when large-scale violence arose. That these were not resounding successes is obvious, but I am aware of no methodologically rigorous account of the balance of causality that led to the outbreak of violence in those contexts. There are then several special political missions that follow large-scale peacekeeping operations—they are essentially a step-down option when peacekeeping has helped stabilize a post-conflict situation for somewhere in the range of five to eight years.

Most interesting are special political missions that are deployed as part of an effort at war termination, or to implement a cease-fire. These include the U.N.'s first post-Cold War operation, the U.N. Mission in El Salvador (MINUSAL, 1991-95), which was eventually accompanied by a lightly-armed observer mission, the U.N. Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL). Together the two are usually credited with helping craft the peace agreements and implementation thereof that came at the end of El Salvador's long-running civil war. It is worth noting, though, that these operations came in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the withdrawal of proxy support to Salvadorian rebels. What balance of contribution was made by the U.N. is unclear, though most of the case literature credits it with a reasonable success. A similar process was followed in Nepal in the 2000s, where first a small human rights office was established, followed by a special political mission and then an SPM accompanied by a lightly armed observer force that helped to navigate the parties (the government, royal family, and communist rebels) to a stable peace agreement.

The U.N.'s more recent experience with political missions in the Middle East is substantial, and the picture is decidedly mixed. The relevant operations are:

- **U.N. Special Coordinator Office for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO).** The U.N. Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process was established after the conclusion of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. In its first iteration it was structured in a limited fashion as an assistance coordination mechanism; later, under Prime Minister Ehud Barak, it was broadened to have a more explicitly political role. It was established by the secretary-general who "informed" the Security Council of his intention to establish the operation. This was in effect one of the early generation special political missions that are now part of the regular U.N. toolkit.
- **UNSCOL and the Blue Line negotiations.** This U.N. special political mission in Lebanon was established when Israel decided—after diplomatic urging by the U.N., inter alia—to withdraw its occupation force from southern Lebanon. This warrants more detailed consideration (below) for what it reveals about the U.N.'s political experience of negotiating in a physical and political space where Hezbollah was a major presence and where the regional proxy dynamics were on full display.
- **U.N. Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).** As special political mission deployed into Iraq alongside the NATO training mission and U.S. forces, UNAMI was mandated to support political negotiations among the parties. The mission was attacked at the Canal Hotel, resulting in the second assassination of a U.N. SRSG in the Middle East (this time by Islamic terrorists) and the largest loss of life among civilian U.N. personnel in the history of the organization. UNAMI would in later stages help negotiate some part of the political deals between Baghdad and Kurdish factions. No assessment suggests that UNAMI was a major factor in either the limited successes of political negotiation in Iraq, or the substantial failures.

- **U.N. Guards Contingent in Iraq (UNGCI).** A small but reasonably well-equipped force deployed into Iraq in the aftermath of the bombing of the Canal Hotel, for the sole purpose of protecting the U.N. civilians remaining in Iraq.
- **U.N./LAS political mission in Syria.** A thoroughly discredited political mission that was notable only for one thing, its co-authorization by the League of Arab States, in a rare moment of semi-unity. Operated out of a political base in Geneva, with a limited civilian mission presence in Syria wholly dependent for its movement on the consent and support of the Syrian state and armed forces—which was limited, episodic, and controlled. As special envoy of the secretary-general, Kofi Annan did succeed in forging the Geneva Accords, only to have them profoundly undermined by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton within hours of the talks' conclusion. (There is little evidence that they would have been implemented even if the U.S. had not effectively scuttled them.)
- **Libya.** Libya hosts an unusual U.N. operation—what is in effect a multidimensional peacekeeping operation minus the forces. A force component or MNF was mooted for Libya, but not pursued until there was sufficient pressure from the U.K. and France and hesitation among Libyan rebels. It is likely that we will soon see a U.S. military counterterrorism presence in eastern Libya, and perhaps a more structured force as well. These would then likely be operating in parallel, though an integrated structure could emerge. So far, the U.N.'s political mission in Libya has been able to sustain negotiations, but not prevent the deterioration of the security situation in much of the east of the country.

In effect, the baseline condition for a political mission to have a prospect for making a contribution to political negotiation or the crafting and implementation of peace agreements, is the *prior*, full cessation of hostilities. Deploying a political mission into an area of active conflict seems unlikely to be feasible, let alone successful.

Those political missions that have succeeded or succeeded in relative terms, appear to share the following characteristics:

- a widely accepted peace agreement, broadly adhered to by all major armed factions and groups;
- no external support to government or rebel forces, and sometimes the opposite, i.e. contact groups or similar that create a framework for outside actors to put pressure on internal factions to comply with the terms of a peace agreement; and
- an accompanying observer force, usually lightly armed.

2.5 Political legitimacy and sovereignty

An essential question under any military arrangement is the political support to and perceived legitimacy of the U.N.'s operations. Under ideal circumstances, the combination of a widely supported peace agreement and an international situation in which the U.N. secretary-general is widely viewed as an impartial and legitimate figure means that an SRSG is deployed with a degree of built-in legitimacy and the benefit of the doubt. However, the chances of ideal circumstances applying are slim.

A first question that will be asked, given contemporary U.N. norms, is whether the SRSG needs to be from the region, or at least be a Muslim. The actual experience of

international peacekeeping in the Middle East suggests that the answer is no. Successful SRSGs in the region have come from outside the region: it is no accident that the vast bulk of leading political figures and SRSGs used by the U.N. in the region have been from small northern European states, up to and including the current UNSCOL SRSG Sigrid Kaag of the Netherlands.

Still, given the inflamed tensions in the region, the regional proxy dynamics, and the tendency of the various sub-state and non-state parties to make a political and even targeting issue of U.N. personnel's religious or regional identity, at the very least it would be wise to create an additional political mechanism that could buttress the SRSG and bolster her/his legitimacy.

Three mechanisms have been used in the past for this purpose, and could be useful here, with the right composition (regional states, non-regional Muslim states, and major donors).

- **Groups of friends.** The most frequently used mechanism for allowing governments to interact with the U.N. on a country hosting a peace operation is a “group of friends,” or some variant of it such as the International Committee in Support of the Transition in the DRC. A study for the Center on International Cooperation in 2006 noted that such mechanisms had been involved in a majority of post-Cold War peacekeeping cases. However, the utility of different groups to different missions has varied widely—and the members of these groups are usually distinct from troop contributors to the missions involved, although there have been exceptions, including Haiti and Sierra Leone.
- **High-level political conferences.** In cases where long-term peace operations require political attention and ongoing negotiations to maintain force levels, member states can facilitate talks through regular conferences such as the “Two Times Seven” talks on Haiti (a process that brings together the deputy foreign and defense ministers of seven Latin American troop contributors twice a year to discuss, *inter alia*, the future of the mission). A similar mechanism: The EU convened a special session of the European Council with then-Secretary-General Kofi Annan, to discuss forces for Lebanon in 2006. The political convening power of such events helps increase public political clarity over the goals and needs of peacekeeping, and conveys to the parties on the ground that there are high geopolitical costs with attacking or undermining the operation.
- **Formalized oversight bodies.** This has been done in two cases. One is in Bosnia, where the head of the mission reports not to the U.N. Security Council but to the Peace Implementation Council, a constellation of 55 countries and agencies comprising all of the relevant outside actors. The Contact Group has no prior legal existence but was simply the designated entity for the management of the Bosnia operation. A second, perhaps more applicable case, is the occupied Palestinian Territory, where the U.N. political mission operates with the support of (not reporting to) the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for Assistance to the Palestinian People (AHLC). The AHLC is comprised essentially as a donor body, and meets both in capitals at the foreign minister level and in country at the ambassadorial level. All of the major Arab states are present, as are the European donors, non-European donors (e.g. Japan), and the United States and Russia. Membership is, effectively, by contribution. The AHLC is serviced by a joint secretariat comprised of the U.N. and the World Bank, which gives it a capacity to coordinate assistance activity on the ground, and gives the U.N. and the World Bank an ability to report up on economic, humanitarian, and, to a limited degree,

political issues to a wider and more senior body than the UNSC. At various points in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and negotiations since Oslo, the AHLC has been used as a forum to quell tensions, generate political support for the U.N., and generate funds for reconstruction activities.

Closely related to the issue of the legitimacy of the U.N.'s political presence is the sovereignty and authority question—i.e. will the U.N. presence simply be an advisory one, as in normal U.N. operations, or will the U.N. have some form of trusteeship authority or similar.

This may be particularly relevant in the context of transitional politics in Syria, given also the devastation of Syrian governance authorities and political institutions. Here, too, it is useful to remember that there is a range of alternatives available:

- *Full-blown sovereign authority.* In Kosovo and East Timor, the U.N. was the fully authorized sovereign executive during the transitional periods in these territories. Domestic political actors had advisory roles or status but they had no legal authority for constitutional, political, security, or economic functions.
- *Hybrid arrangements.* A slightly softer alternative is the model used in Cambodia, where the U.N. did not have trustee status but it was the “transitional administrator”; sovereignty still resided in Cambodian hands, but the execution of sovereignty relied on the U.N. administrator. (Think of sovereignty as the queen, and the U.N. as a prime minister.)
- *The Brahimi variant.* In Afghanistan, U.N. Special Representative and mediator Lakhdar Brahimi orchestrated a specific trope, whereby the U.N. brought together a maximum number of willing parties to the conflict and had them invite into the country the external force and the U.N. presence. This preserves at least the political fig leaf of consent and of national sovereignty, even while real power goes to the outside implementing entities. The Afghan authorities retained formal sovereignty, even though most decisionmaking flowed through the U.S., NATO, and U.N. entities.

2.5. The planning model: Lessons from Lebanon

Reviewing the checkered history of international peacekeeping in the region, southern Lebanon stands out in terms of the scale and depth of the international community's engagement and the U.N.'s role—both in its political texture and its operational flexibility. The experiences are worth a brief examination.

Lebanon is a country of roughly 6 million people densely packed into 10,000 square kilometers (but concentrated on the coast), divided between Sunni, Shiite, and Christian populations. By dint of its location, it has a high geopolitical salience. It also has a history of devastating civil wars and cross-border conflict, especially with Israel. It was under Syrian military occupation for a dozen years and has had a divided government in which now participates the political wing of Hezbollah, an organization that, until the advent of ISIS, was the most powerful terrorist organization in the world.

As such, Lebanon represents a microcosm of the wider Middle Eastern conflict landscape. It is notable that during a period when the U.N. was not a major factor in conflict management elsewhere in the Middle East, the U.N. undertook a series of critical and innovative, political, operational, and military roles in Lebanon, each of

them constituting marketplace innovations in U.N. conflict management structures. Each of these provides potential lessons, perhaps even a starting point for planning of contemporary conflict management operations in the Middle East.

The U.N.'s role in Lebanon dates back to 1978 when following conflict between Israel and Lebanon, the U.N. established UNIFIL, a lightly armed, modestly sized force deployed in southern Lebanon that came to epitomize the relatively feckless U.N. forces that were deployed in many conflict settings around the world. UNIFIL was unable to stop significant Israeli penetrations of southern Lebanon and it was unable to stop Hezbollah's penetration of southern Lebanon.

The situation began to change in the late 1990s with the election of Ehud Barak as prime minister of Israel. Barak and his labor government decided that it was time to end the hugely unpopular, expensive, and draining Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, or at least partially end it. The initial plans were for Israel to pull part of its forces out of part of the territory in southern Lebanon. The U.N. at the time had deployed a special coordinator, a kind of mediator-light function, Terje Rød-Larsen. Rød-Larsen, with the backing of Kofi Annan, convinced Barak that Israel would gain politically from withdrawing from the whole of the territory, thereby allowing the Security Council to endorse the withdrawal and certify the end of occupation in southern Lebanon. After extensive negotiations, Barak accepted this, and Israeli forces began withdrawing from southern Lebanon, overseen by the U.N. To perform this function, the U.N. simply added to Rød-Larsen's mandate, creating in effect an ad hoc special political mechanism backed by DPKO logistics; this informal mechanism monitored Israeli withdrawal, certified the completion of their task, and generated U.N. Security Council endorsement of the action.

What are the relevant points about this episode, which lasted from 1999 to 2000? First is effective political interaction with the Israeli political establishment, still the most important military actor in the region. U.N.-Israel relations are often tense and difficult. In this phase, effective interactions between the U.N., the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), and the Israeli political class allowed for a significant change in the conflict and political situation in southern Lebanon.

The second point is direct negotiations with Hezbollah. During this episode, the U.N. had to negotiate with the Syrian army, the Syrian government, the Lebanese government and all of its factions, and Hezbollah, the largest operational force on the ground in southern Lebanon. This is relevant because it is often viewed as difficult or nearly impossible for groups to negotiate with terrorist organizations. In this context, the U.N. had both Israeli and U.S. backing to conduct quiet negotiations with Hezbollah. In almost any setting, the U.N. would be deployed in contemporary conflict management in the Middle East. Direct negotiations with terrorist organizations is going to be a relevant component of such activity.

Third, there was close coordination between the U.N. special coordinator and P5 representatives in Beirut. This is an important point to make. U.N. special representatives don't operate in isolation. When they work effectively, they can serve as a locus for P5 politics and diplomacy in the country in question. This does not always occur, but when it does, the U.N. can become an important reference point for wider diplomatic efforts. This has certainly been the case in southern Lebanon. Indeed, moving beyond the blue line moment, this pattern of good coordination between U.N. special representatives and the P5 in their local representatives in Beirut has continued through UNSCOL.

UNSCOL was one of the first wave of special political missions or SPMs established by the U.N. and one of its more successful. UNSCOL is notable for two points. The first is already mentioned—the continued good cooperation between the special representative and the P5. Second, the U.N. special coordinators for UNSCOL have been well respected by all parties in the Lebanese government and the international community. This also lays the foundation for later political mandates relating to the withdrawal of Syrian occupying forces, following the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

It is also notable that UNSCO and UNSCOL special coordinators have not come from the region. Often when discussing U.N. political representatives these days, there is a presumed necessity for U.N. political representatives to come from the region in which they are deployed. In the Lebanese case, and in all of the relevant Middle Eastern cases, the challenge will be that virtually every Arab state is a party to virtually every other conflict in the region in some fashion. Thus, the neutrality or partiality of this special representative may be in question. In Lebanon, the special coordinators have been Italian-Swedish, British, Norwegian, and Dutch. Scandinavian neutrality appears to be an effective instrument in the U.N. and also in Lebanon, as it often has throughout the U.N.'s history in the Middle East.

A further phase of evolution came after the Hezbollah war of 2006. We've already referred to the effort by the U.S. to get NATO to intervene in southern Lebanon in the aftermath of that war and regional opposition to NATO intervention. The focus then turned to the United Nations. The U.N. operation that followed was one of the most innovative in the U.N.'s repertoire, and I believe, constitutes the most important planning reference point for future operations in the Middle East.

The innovative elements of this operation are as follows: First, it blended the features of a multinational force and a blue helmet operation. That is to say those member states who had the capability to do so deployed their troops, equipment, and capacity through their own logistics operations. This was true for France, Italy, Germany, and other European nations. At the same time however, those nations that did not have the capacity to do so, such as India and Pakistan, were able to use more traditional U.N. logistics mechanism to get their troops and equipment onto the ground in southern Lebanon.

What that allowed for is first, extremely rapid mobilization. Almost 10,000 troops were deployed in southern Lebanon in a matter of two or three weeks, unlike the normal U.N. pattern of several months, at times up to nine months, being required to deploy U.N. forces. That is relevant in the context of high order opposition and coherent armies. The ability to deploy rapidly and effectively is crucial to success. At the same time, because there were two modes of deployment, that did not preclude non-Western nations from deploying into the force.

Second, it is worth noting that what is now known as UNIFIL II, the second variation of UNIFIL, is of relatively large size in relation to the territory in question. 15,000 troops are deployed in southern Lebanon, an area of roughly 2000 square kilometers. Third, and critical, is the participation of advanced militaries from France to Italy, Germany, and India. With them come substantial military capabilities. UNIFIL has an anti-aircraft capability, air power capability, and a navy, as well as high order intelligence capabilities, all of the things that are going to be required to fight advanced armies and advanced terrorist organizations on the ground. These are not capabilities normally associated with U.N. operations, but they are present in full scope in southern Lebanon.

Fourth, and crucially, was the creation of what was known as the Strategic Military Cell to bolster the intelligence and command and control support to those militaries. Advanced military contingents are used to deploying with high order intelligence, satellite, and communications capabilities managed from headquarters, not from the ground. The U.N. has no standing capabilities to do this. That is among the reasons why advanced militaries have been reluctant to participate in blue helmet operations. UNIFIL II squared that circle by creating a bespoke unit, the Strategic Military Cell, into which advanced troop contributing countries put strategic planners, intelligence assets, and command and control operators in order to bolster the U.N.'s traditional command and control capability.

The result was a highly effective deployment. It was a strong, effective fighting force under U.N. imprimatur deployed in parallel with an effective SRSG. Critics will say, "Let's look at the situation in southern Lebanon today. Hezbollah is still operating. It has not been disarmed, which is one of the original mandates of UNIFIL II. Hezbollah participates in the government of Lebanon." Those are all real concerns. But compare the situation to the rest of the neighborhood: Lebanon, and southern Lebanon particularly, has remained stable despite extraordinary pressures from refugees, regional conflict, and turbulence in the Arab world at large. There is very little doubt that the presence of UNIFIL II and an effective SRSG in southern Lebanon and Beirut has contributed to that stability under extraordinary pressures. While the situation in southern Lebanon is far from ideal, contrast it to Syria. There is no question that the situation is entirely preferable. Creating UNIFIL II, its multinational force and blue helmet blended components, its rapidity of deployment, the participation of advanced militaries, the participation of non-Western militaries and the Strategic Military Cell to bolster its capability, and the core deployment of an effective special representative of the U.N. for political and civilian purposes, all of these constitute the essential planning element for any credible U.N. force deployed into Libya, Yemen, or even potentially northern Syria.

3. SUMMING UP: BALANCING LEGITIMACY AND CAPACITY IN POTENTIAL OPERATIONS

In a parallel paper by Kenneth Pollack for this project on stabilizing Syria, the assumption is that the main outside intervention would be a U.S. force or multinational force led by the United States. Indeed, there is no other realistic option for Syria. The scale of Syria's assembled military capacity, in the hands of the Syrian armed forces, the Kurdish rebels, and various Syrian rebel forces mean that only two military structures in the world have the capability to tackle that assignment: the U.S. armed forces, and the Russian armed forces; and the Russians are already there.

Even here, it is likely that U.N. dynamics will come into play, as they did in the last case where Russian forces and U.S. and allied forces were deployed in parallel—in Kosovo. There, the UNSC—following negotiations in the G-8—authorized the parallel deployments of a NATO-led force and a U.N.-led civilian operation. (The U.N. civilian operation actually comprised the U.N. itself, the EU, the OSCE, and UNHCR, in distinct "pillars" inside the mission.) The NATO-led force and the U.N. were to coordinate operations. Russia chose to participate in the U.N.-led force—that is, it quickly deployed its troops to the Serbian sector in Kosovo, and initially took control of Pristina airport. Although there are risks to this structure (as when NATO forces were initially instructed to attack the Russian presence at Pristina airport), it does allow for the deployment of significant Western forces in parallel to Russian forces with a minimum of conflict. The necessity of Russian

consent, given their stakes in the issue and their willingness to deploy military power to secure those stakes—conditions that apply strongly in Syria—forced the issue back into the purview of the UNSC, where the Russians could have confidence in their ability to participate in and at least partially shape the implementation of the U.N. decisions. While no one would look back on the Kosovo operation as a model of international stabilization efficiency, the fact of the matter is that in a hotly contested geopolitical space, the structures established for Kosovo allowed for a substantial reduction of violence in Kosovo itself, and the diplomatic, rather than military, management of the conflict over the issue between the U.S., Europe, and Russia. The parallels to Syria are significant.

INTERIM CONCLUSIONS

Syria

There are two essential variables here: whether or not the Geneva process produces a widely accepted plan for political transition; and whether or not the United States—not under this president, but under the next—decides to authorize the use of American military power to begin to change the options on the ground, mostly likely through the elimination of Syrian air power and the establishment of some form of a safe zone in the north, through negotiated collaboration with Syrian Kurdish forces.

If there is a widely accepted transition plan and early phase implementation shows widespread compliance with its terms including a cessation of hostilities, it is possible that a U.N. peacekeeping operation could provide an important plank of stabilization and confidence-building. It would have to have the following elements:

- A high-level political body, modeled along the lines of the Bosnia Contact Group, to provide top-level international support, including from the region. This would have to include the P5, key Sunni states, and Iranian participation.
- A powerful core force provided by a Western nation with high-order capability (perhaps Australia or a similar actor).
- A blend of Western, Arab, and high-end African forces (e.g. Rwandan).
- A highly capable political team with substantial civilian assets.
- An over-the-horizon support and extraction force with air assets sufficient to extract personnel (not necessarily equipment) in a matter of days.

If, as seems more likely, any transition plan is met with substantial opposition from a subset of actors on the ground, then even the most robust, well-managed U.N. peace enforcement operation will be unable to cope. In this scenario the only actor capable of imposing stabilization is the United States; and even that, only in a part of territory.

A U.N. force or political mission could be deployed to a part of territory that has first been stabilized by a U.S.-led force (a multinational force or coalition). Similar mechanisms to those listed above would still need to be applied in these circumstances.

Libya

Libya is an oddity in that the U.N. already has a multidimensional peace operation on the ground—without the force component.

- A first phase would most effectively be managed by a U.N.-mandated multinational force that could impose order in eastern Libya and provide high-level security functions for the country as a whole.
- That could in relatively short order be replaced by a U.N. peacekeeping force modeled on the Mali operation, but with higher quality troop contributors.
- Libya's geography is such that over-the-horizon capabilities are particularly well-suited. A NATO-based extraction force could be designated in Italy, and allow for a far smaller and more nimble force to be deployed to Libya than would normally be feasible.

Yemen

The critical variables in Yemen are three: the timing of an eventual Saudi halt to operations—with the UAE's ending of its participation perhaps a leading indicator; the degree of unity among Yemeni political factions with regards to the terms of political transition agreed in its aftermath; and—hardest to envisage—some form of a quiet Saudi-Iranian deal to resist proxy engagement in Yemen, or at least limit that engagement to financial and political meddling.

Assuming that the political transition plan produces a rough degree of support and compliance—quite a reasonable assumption in this case—it is possible that Yemen would be a case where there is a high level of self-implementation of any transition plan. In that scenario, one could envisage a reconstruction mechanism for Yemen (which will need a lot of physical and economic reconstruction), accompanied by a light U.N. political or observer mechanism. Over-the-horizon support from Djibouti or Ethiopia is a possibility but only if the United States agrees to provide that mechanism, which is politically complicating.

General

It seems likely that the U.N. will be called on to do more in the Middle East than it is currently expecting or planning for. Most peacekeeping policy and planning discussions at the U.N. focus on sub-Saharan Africa. The operational hesitation and political confusion surrounding the question of U.N. peacekeeping in areas where a terrorist entity is present suggests an organization that has not come to terms with new realities, and is unprepared for what is soon to be upon it. But the political constraints of more distinctly Western institutions deploying into the heart of the Arab world, combined with the political divisions and operational weakness of the major Arab regional organizations, suggest few alternatives.

Countries and institutions focused on preparing for transition and reconciliation in current Arab conflicts would be well advised to substantially ramp up diplomatic efforts around the U.N. to begin policy and planning discussions about potential deployments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. This critically should include sustained dialogue with the Dutch government about lessons learned from the Mali operation.

It also seems likely that any configuration of peace agreement, transition plan, or the like will need to be overseen by a bespoke political mechanism, not just the U.N. Security Council. The relevant model here is the Bosnia Contact Group, though the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for Assistance to the Palestinian People also provides useful lessons and options.

Western countries are currently exploring options for international engagement in Syria and other regional conflicts premised on NOT deploying western forces into theater—using U.N. political missions or similar as alternatives. But there is little in the history of political missions or the structure of the conflicts in the region that suggests that this is likely to be a successful strategy. Rather, it is likely to create high risks of U.N. civilians being targeted, held hostage, or otherwise attacked, as part of spoilers' efforts to undermine any agreements reached. At a very minimum, any political mission should be deployed with a U.N. Guards force and an over-the-horizon reinforcement or extraction mechanism, based on U.S. or NATO assets.

APPENDIX TWO

OCTOBER 2016

ATTITUDES OF REGIONAL ACTORS TOWARD THE SYRIAN CONFLICT AND POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

TAMARA COFMAN WITTES AND BRUCE JONES

The Syrian conflict began as domestic, civil violence, which emerged after a peaceful resistance movement was met with government violence against civilians. Over a period of nearly a year, violent resistance groups emerged to retaliate against government attacks on peaceful dissenters and ordinary civilians. These groups were quickly embraced by regional governments (for reasons discussed further below), and the Syrian civil war became a proxy war between regional governments with clashing agendas and priorities. Regional non-state actors also found ready ground in Syria to advance their interests, and have likewise entered the war. Finally, governments from outside of the Middle East entered the fray beginning with American operations against ISIS in September 2014, followed by Russian military engagement in September 2015. Today, the Syrian conflict is fully internationalized both in theater and in its consequences. The multidimensional nature of the conflict vastly complicates efforts to end it.

International efforts to mediate or negotiate an end to the conflict, or even to ameliorate the humanitarian consequences, have focused primarily on the interests and engagement of the United States and Russia, with an embedded assumption that these two powers can persuade their partners in the region to go along with whatever compromises they manage to reach. But even setting aside whether regional actors are persuadable (a particularly doubtful assumption when it comes to Iran), this bifurcated understanding of the conflict dynamics as pro- and anti-Assad does not take full account of the complex interests that regional actors, governmental and non-governmental, have in the Syrian war and its potential outcomes. This paper will limn the major issues under debate amongst regional actors, describe the positioning of different regional players in relation to these issues, explore the various possibilities for coalition-building around shared interests, and imagine how different regional actors might use their leverage in the conflict to respond to different potential outcomes.

ENDING THE WAR

We must be realistic, however, about what steps will, and will not, end the Syrian conflict. Recently, some policy experts have suggested that,¹³ in the name of advancing

13 Hannah Allam, "Assad Must Go' Demand Should Go, Ex-White House Official Says," *McClatchy*, May 12, 2016, <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/article77313747.html>.

great power concord to end the war, the United States should relax its view that Bashar Assad's departure from power is a requisite for any political settlement. This view rests on the assumption that Russia will not bend in its insistence on Assad's remaining in place, and on the assumption that a U.S.-Russian agreement on leaving Assad in power would override the preferences of those fighting on the ground to remove him. Both of these premises are incorrect.

Likewise, some suggest that the sectarian nature of the conflict, and the deep investment of regional powers in backing their preferred sides, mean that it is not possible to hasten an end to the war at all, and that it must be allowed to "burn itself out." This policy option is infeasible from moral, political, and security standpoints. The scale of death and destruction already, over nearly five years of war, should shame (not just shock) the conscience of the world. Those seeking to escape this misery deserve succor, and those seeking to end the carnage deserve support. And it is beyond question that Bashar Assad and his allies are the ones responsible for the vast majority of this death, destruction, and displacement.

In political and security terms, the war's spillover into neighboring countries and now into Europe can still get worse. Key states like Lebanon and Jordan are at risk of destabilization and/or extremist terrorism the longer the conflict goes on and the more of its consequences they must absorb. Turkey has already suffered attacks by extremist groups, even as it continues fighting a Kurdish insurgency in its southeast and dealing with the consequences of a failed coup in July 2016. And the war has continued to be a powerful source of recruitment for extremists, drawing fighters and fellow travelers from around the world. ISIS and al-Qaida feed on the civil conflict, and the chaos on the ground is what gives them room to operate. It is imperative that the world remain engaged in efforts to secure an end to the conflict as soon as possible.

We must therefore understand clearly the interests and imperatives driving the major players in this conflict, and we must understand, too, that the battlefield dynamics will heavily condition the prospects of any political settlement. Ending the bloody war in Bosnia in the 1990s involved getting the major external powers with stakes in the outcome—the United States, the Europeans, and Russia—to agree on the basic outlines of a settlement and impose it on the parties. But imposing it on the parties required a shift in the balance of power on the battlefield, brought about by Croat military victories and ultimately a NATO bombing campaign. Bosnia also required a large-scale, long-term United Nations presence to separate the factions and to enforce and implement the agreement.

Absent a change on the ground, diplomacy alone is unlikely to end the Syrian war. Right now, the Assad government and its patrons in Tehran and Moscow have no interest in a sustained cease-fire, because the battleground dynamics continue to shift in their favor. They used the partial cease-fires of spring 2016 (and the brief effort in early September) to consolidate territorial gains from opposition forces and to further weaken those forces through continued attacks. The latest failed U.S.-Russian diplomatic agreement, according to my sources, has reinforced views amongst anti-Assad fighters on the ground and their diplomatic backers that the United States is now willing to accept the Russian premise of an Assad-run Syria as a bulwark against ISIS. As the regime, backed by Russia and Iran, scales up its assault on Aleppo, these forces are more, not less, willing to ally themselves with extreme factions on the ground in order to protect their territory and continue their war against Assad. Failed U.S.-Russian diplomacy seems to be worsening the extremism problem in Syria (a self-serving and self-fulfilling prophecy for Russia), and, if regional governments backing the rebels respond in kind, threatens to send the conflict into a new escalatory spiral.

STARTING POINT: REGIONAL ANXIETIES

Regional actors view the Syrian conflict through the lens of the breakdown of state order (and of several states) in the wake of the 2011 Arab uprisings. The anxieties generated by the collapse of the stable state system that structured the region for the previous half-century have led most regional actors to re-evaluate their threat environment and has exacerbated divisions amongst them on approaches to regional geopolitics. Here are five key dimensions of the current regional anxiety:

- Regime security has long been the primary concern for most Middle Eastern governments; in the wake of the Arab uprisings, and in the face of increased ethnic, sectarian, and other cross-cutting tensions within their societies, many of these governments feel **a sense of profound existential threat**. They view regional conflicts, and the role of external actors, through the lens of what will support, or undermine, their own regime survival.
- The upending of the regional balance of power that lasted largely from 1956 through 2011 has unleashed a **new geopolitical competition** between the major powers in the region: the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Although in some ways the conflict began with the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003, this competition is now playing out region-wide, as cleavages within Arab states opened by the uprisings have been skillfully exploited by Iran to expand its influence in some places and claim even more influence than it likely has in others. Recent tensions between Qatar and its neighbors Saudi Arabia and the UAE amplify this dynamic.
- **The emergence of fierce sectarian conflict** across the region overlaps with the geopolitical conflict just described. In confronting the uprisings, governments on both sides of the Sunni-Shiite divide found a sectarian narrative useful in rallying their populations and in justifying their actions. The sectarian narrative also helped Sunni countries with Shiite minorities to deter, isolate, and punish any domestic Shiite dissent. The sectarian dimension of the opposition to Assad was elevated and highlighted by Sunni states, for example, immediately following the Saudi-led crackdown on Shiite protesters in Bahrain. The self-interested deployment of sectarian narratives created a self-fulfilling prophecy, and increased the incentive on both sides of the sectarian divide to escalate their real power competition, both directly and through proxies. Today, sectarian conflict is far more than rhetoric for too many in Iraq and Syria, where a true intercommunal conflict is underway. The state-led cultivation of sectarian tension has also been exploited by extremists to advance their own goals and win recruits, as when ISIS attacks Shiite mosques in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.¹⁴

¹⁴ The overlapping of sectarian divisions and the regional power struggle thus has the effect of exacerbating regional conflict. And by rooting conflict in “primordial” differences, the sectarian dynamic makes diplomatic conflict resolution and the re-establishment of multiethnic or multisectarian states far more difficult when the wars end. The Middle East is crisscrossed with different tribes, sects, and ethnic communities, and has been for centuries—meaning that polities that mark membership on the basis of exclusive ethnic or sectarian identity are a very poor recipe for enduring peace in the region. And yet, throughout its modern history, the Middle East has seen colonial and local powers wield ethnic differences as part of a divide-and-rule strategy, often with disastrous results. The lesson is clear: to be stable, the states of the Middle East need to embrace the pluralism and equality of their citizenry.

- The sense of disorientation and existential challenge is compounded, for key regional actors, by **their sense that the United States is no longer as committed** as it had been to guaranteeing a stable regional order that advantages these states' interests. For many regional actors on both sides of the Syrian conflict, America's reticence about investing in regional stability was evident in its attitude toward the Arab uprisings, but is most clearly manifested in its refusal to engage militarily in the Syrian civil war (despite its willingness to employ force against ISIS in Syria). Some regional actors meet this American reluctance with horror and a sense of betrayal, while others meet it with triumphalism—but there is no question that the lack of a clear American policy approach to the Syrian conflict has produced a greater willingness on the part of regional players to act autonomously and to hedge their bets in independent policies even when they appear to be cooperating with American policy initiatives.
- Finally, the 2011 uprisings offered unprecedented opportunities for **the empowerment of Muslim Brotherhood-linked political movements** in several Arab states. Brotherhood movements have been leading opposition forces across the Arab world for many decades (in Syria, Brotherhood activists opposing Hafez Assad were massacred by the government in 1982); their empowerment was thus viewed with grave alarm by some governments in the region, and with a sense of justice by others. While some Arab states have peacefully integrated and even co-opted Brotherhood parties (notably in Morocco, Kuwait, and Bahrain), others have outlawed them and/or declared them to be terrorist organizations (notably in Egypt, UAE, and Saudi Arabia) inherently subversive of state authority. Divergent views over the Brotherhood came to the fore most notably in regional states' attitudes toward Egypt's failed post-revolutionary transition, and have engendered bitter divisions and suspicions amongst Arab governments in their Syria policies as well.

It is important to understand these broader attitudes and anxieties in evaluating the approaches that different regional governments take toward the Syrian civil war and its potential outcomes. I will now lay out the major coalitions of interest amongst regional actors surrounding the Syrian conflict, and explain the positions of major actors within each coalition.

ISSUES SHAPING REGIONAL CALCULATIONS OVER SYRIA

Two major issues structure regional actors' views of the Syrian conflict. The first is a disagreement over the role that Iran will play in post-conflict Syria; the second is a disagreement over the primacy of preserving Syria as a unitary state with a strong central government, currently headed by Bashar Assad. Positioning on these two issues generates divergent priorities amongst governments that are all partners to the United States and Europe in both the Syrian negotiations and the anti-ISIS fight. These differences have frustrated the negotiating process, hampered cooperation in the fight against ISIS, and threaten to escalate the Syrian war further. It is thus imperative to understand these disagreements more fully, and how they shape emerging coalitions within the region.

Iran and Hezbollah in Syria

Syria's regime has enjoyed a mutually beneficial partnership with Tehran for more than three decades. For Iran, Syria has been an invaluable partner in shaping developments

in Lebanon (with its large Shiite population), a vital channel of support to its proxy militia, Hezbollah, and a base from which it can directly target the Jewish state. Since the uprising of 2011, Iran has invested many millions of dollars, weapons, and thousands of fighters (government and militia) to support Assad's regime against its enemies.

The gains made by the Assad regime (with Russian and Iranian help) over the past year since Russia intervened directly in the conflict, and the current assault on Aleppo, enhance the disturbing prospect of a Syrian government remaining in power in Damascus that is—more than ever—dependent on Iranian funding, Iranian military support, and the importation of Iranian-backed militias. While the Russians are perhaps concerned more about the Syrian state as a bulwark against extremism, Iran is deeply committed to the survival of its Alawi client and the maintenance of Syria as a channel for Iranian support to Hezbollah. All three of these actors (Assad, Iran, Russia) see the full conquest of Aleppo as a key milestone, perhaps even a turning point, in their effort to guarantee the survival of the Assad regime.

Iran is determined to sustain Assad in power because Syria is the strategic depth and channel of support to Hezbollah, Iran's most effective regional ally, and is also a good entry point for Iran to the Arab-Israeli arena. According to a new BBC investigation and other sources,¹⁵ Iran has reportedly bolstered its Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) forces in Syria with militias made up of Iraqi Shiites and Hazara refugees from Afghanistan, who are picked up in Iran and given minimal training before being sent to Syria to fight. The level of Iranian investment in the survival of Assad's regime is impressive, and should increase skepticism that diplomatic talks including Iran will yield a constructive outcome.

Hezbollah's investment in saving the Assad regime has altered the geopolitical equation in the region in ways that suggest the potential for further escalation of conflict either inside Lebanon or with Israel. Hezbollah fighters have been operating in Syria, perhaps about 5,000 at a time in rotation, and they have lost about a 1,000 fighters there. This emphasizes very clearly for all to see (including the Lebanese people) that the organization is not so focused, as it claims, in defending Lebanon, but rather on increasing its own power and influence and securing Shiite and Iranian influence in the Arab world. In addition, the Syrian civil war has spilled over into Lebanon already, reigniting sectarian tensions and generating an influx of 1 million Syrian refugees—adding 25 percent to Lebanon's population. Lebanon has not attracted even a fraction of the regional or international aid that has flowed to Turkey and Jordan; indeed, Saudi Arabia recently cut aid to Lebanon's army to show its displeasure that the Lebanese government did not express sufficient outrage over Iranian protesters' attack on the Saudi embassy in Tehran.

The tensions in Lebanon are evident in its politics—the sect-based political factions have been unable to agree on a president for the past year and a half, and Sunni extremists have more than once sought to provoke Hezbollah through targeted attacks on Shiite areas. Hezbollah has been boycotting parliament as well, exercising its effective veto over the political system, and preventing any progress on basic governance in the country. At the same time, Lebanon's Sunni parties have not sought a confrontation with Hezbollah inside Lebanon, preferring to seek to maintain national stability and keep the Lebanese

15 Fariba Sahraei, "Syria war: The Afghans sent by Iran to fight for Assad," *BBC*, April 15, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-36035095>.

economy moving. The Lebanese armed forces has even been cooperating with Hezbollah to control refugee flows and smuggling across the Syrian-Lebanese border, including to prevent radical Sunni groups from infiltrating and launching attacks in Lebanon that could be a catalyst for conflict.

So at the moment, Lebanon maintains stability because both major political forces in the country share an interest in avoiding domestic confrontation. This could shift and spark conflict for several reasons: first, a major bombing or other terrorist attack by Sunni radicals could force both parties to respond; second, Saudi pressure on the Sunni political leadership in Lebanon could compel them to take a more confrontational stance with Hezbollah; third, a change in the Syrian conflict—either a positive or negative outcome for Hezbollah and its allies—could shift the group’s calculus regarding domestic politics.

For example, if by some chance the balance shifts in Syria to advantage Sunni forces relative to the Assad regime, or if a diplomatic settlement calls for Assad’s ouster and a new inclusive government, this would threaten Hezbollah’s supply line from Iran, and its freedom of operation along its front with Israel. This could lead the group to focus more on shoring up its domestic legitimacy in Lebanon and/or its credentials as a defender of Arabs against Israel. Likewise, if sectarian tension in Lebanon increases, and particularly if Sunni extremist groups fired up by the Syrian war carry out more violent attacks in Lebanon, Hezbollah could easily choose to try and win political points domestically by attacking Israel. Thus far, Hezbollah has not chosen this path, perhaps because of Israel’s deterrent power, perhaps because it worries about overstretch fighting on two fronts; but a pause or even a halt to the conflict in Syria would change that equation—and unintended escalation is also a possibility.

The Syrian war has also increased Hezbollah’s capability and readiness for a new round of conflict with Israel, raising the prospect that Israel’s hard-won deterrence against the group may not hold much longer. The war has given Hezbollah fighters extensive experience in conventional warfare, increasing their battle hardiness and thus their capabilities in the event of another war with Israel. Iran has already enabled Hezbollah to expand its rocket and missile arsenal to nearly 100,000, some with advanced guidance and some with a range that would enable them to target infrastructure and to reach all of Israel’s population centers. The prospect of an outcome from the Syrian war that leaves Assad in power and Iran in effective control of the country presages further transfers of weapons and technology from Iran to Hezbollah through Damascus. This prospect makes leaving Assad in control of Damascus a deeply concerning outcome for Israel’s security. Israel has acted to try and prevent the transfer of advanced technology to Hezbollah through Damascus several times over the course of the Syrian conflict—but 100 percent success would be a miracle.

Iran (like Saudi Arabia, see below) has significant capacity to seek to shape outcomes in Syria by acting beyond the battlefield. And, like Saudi Arabia, it is difficult to imagine a compromise deal on Syria that the Iranians would find minimally acceptable. Therefore, we should expect that Iran would seek to undermine any outcome in Syria it finds unpalatable, and that it would be willing to invest heavily and use a wide range of tools to achieve that goal. Iran might well use political assassination of key Syrian or other figures deemed important for implementation of a compromise deal. It could also attack its adversaries indirectly, using proxies—so, for example, a Western-backed stabilization force could face attacks by Shiite militias, just as Iran used such militias against the

U.S.-led coalition in Iraq. The Iranians also have significant economic leverage in Syria, not just through economic support for the regime but through Iranian ownership of Syrian property and facilities. Iran would likely seek to use its and its allies' economic positioning inside Syria to stymie efforts at reconstruction that support a deal Iran finds unfavorable.

As is evident, Iran, Hezbollah, and Assad are locked in a deeply interdependent alliance from which none of them is likely to defect.

The “no Iran, no way” coalition

Iran's efforts to expand its influence—in Syria and in the region as a whole—present a concern that unites nearly all of the United States' partners in the region. Indeed, for many (but not all) American partners in the region, Iranian supremacy is a concern that far outweighs the threat from ISIS—a fact that presents an immediate and notable gap between Western and regional priorities in Syria, and that has repeatedly put these governments at loggerheads. But even amongst this group of regional governments alarmed by Iranian power, the intensity of concern varies. Israel and Saudi Arabia are the leading partners in a vehemently anti-Iranian bloc within the region, with support from Bahrain and Kuwait. Qatar and the United Arab Emirates also oppose Iranian expansionism, but in the Syrian context this concern is tempered by other considerations, as we will see below.

Some Sunni Arab states embrace the goal of preserving Syrian territorial integrity and the central government, but all are troubled by the prospect that this government would be under the thumb of Tehran. Any political settlement that institutionalizes Iran's now-overwhelming role in Syria will likewise increase Iran's ability to threaten Israel's northern border, to destabilize Lebanese and perhaps also Jordanian politics, and to interfere with ongoing efforts to assuage the anxieties of Iraqi Sunnis and bring them back into alignment with the government in Baghdad.

The rising likelihood of an Iranian-dominated Syria emerging from the war has induced a noticeable change in attitude toward the Syrian conflict by Israel. Israeli officials took a fairly ambivalent stance toward the civil war for several years, having long judged Assad as a stable and even predictable adversary (although they were always wary of the Syrian-Iranian alliance). But today, they judge Assad's survival in office as possible only through effective Iranian suzerainty, putting their most powerful enemy in charge right on their border.¹⁶ Israel has already acted at least once to attack a reported Hezbollah/IRGC presence on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights, and has warned against attempts to attack Israel across the Golan.¹⁷ Iranian domination of post-conflict Syria—or even of a significant part of it—would also likely spell an escalation in Iranian weapons transfers to Hezbollah. Although it has demonstrated its intent to use force to block such transfers, Israel cannot expect to have 100 percent success in preventing the provision of increasingly sophisticated rocket and missile technologies to Hezbollah. These and other types of support from Iran through Damascus could increase Hezbollah's capacity to wage asymmetric war against Israel, at great cost to Israel's civilian population. Israeli observers are increasingly alarmed at this scenario, and Israeli officials have stated

¹⁶ Based on conversations with Israeli government and security officials during the months January-July 2016.

¹⁷ “Iran general died in ‘Israeli strike’ in Syrian Golan,” BBC, January 19, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30882935>.

clearly that,¹⁸ if faced with a choice, they would prefer to confront the non-state ISIS, rather than Iran and its state-sponsored partner Hezbollah, across the Israeli-Syrian frontier.

How might Israel seek to protect its interests going forward? Former and current Israeli officials tell me that Israel learned its lesson in the Lebanon war, and do not seek to shape political outcomes in Syria. But they do have clear, narrower interests that they are already taking steps to protect. We should expect that additional gains by Assad regime forces and their allies will heighten Israeli readiness to push back an Iranian or Hezbollah presence along the Golan border. We might see more frequent air attacks by Israel on such forces or on supply convoys to Hezbollah. In addition, conflict escalation in Syria could easily heat up competition amongst the fighting factions for territory in the Golan—and Israel would likely seek (or perhaps already is seeking) to advance its preferred outcomes in such battles. Israel has had quiet, small-scale, but ongoing, engagement with Syrian fighters across the Golan border fence for many months: providing emergency medical treatment for wounded Syrians at hospitals in Israel, but also sending humanitarian supplies across the border fence into Syrian territory. While hard facts are scarce, it is not overly speculative to assume that these interactions are being used to gather intelligence and to offer some form of support to Sunni nationalist Syrian factions operating in the Golan who are fighting IRGC, Hezbollah, and Shiite militia factions there.

Saudi Arabia's approach to the region since 2011 has been structured by what it perceives as concerted Iranian efforts to penetrate and destabilize Arab states regionwide, and to expand its influence across the region. Saudi Arabia sees the Iranian challenge through several simultaneous lenses. Geopolitically, Iran presents a fundamental challenge to (U.S.-supported) Sunni Arab hegemony over the Middle East, and thus to the re-establishment of a regional order similar to that which prevailed before the upheavals of 2011. Iran also presents a challenge to regime security in several key Arab states where Saudi Arabia has traditionally had major influence, such as Bahrain, Yemen, and Lebanon, and Iran's influence over the Shiite-led government in Baghdad is a source of ongoing concern for the kingdom. Finally, Iran's revolutionary Islamic government presents a vision of Shiite empowerment and legitimacy that is a challenge to the Sunni hegemony manifested in the kingdom's stewardship over the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina. The kingdom saw the P5+1 nuclear deal with Iran as a betrayal of its interests—not mostly because Saudis felt threatened by Iranian nuclear capabilities, but because the agreement broke the economic and diplomatic isolation surrounding Iran and lent greater force and legitimacy to Iran's international engagement.

Thus, for Saudi Arabia the regionwide struggle with Iran is a zero-sum game, and the Syrian war is its epicenter. A defeat of Iran in Syria, and a removal of Iranian influence from Damascus, is perhaps the kingdom's greatest strategic priority after its own security from Iranian penetration (a concern that led the kingdom into a war in Yemen that is still ongoing). A senior Saudi official recently told me that the kingdom's goal in Syria is a unified country with no Iranian influence—a goal that appears practically unachievable without a dramatic shift in the balance of forces in the war. This official signaled that Saudi Arabia was prepared to escalate its support for opposition groups fighting Assad in Syria, and that he thought it was “inevitable” that we would see ground troops from

18 Judah Ari Gross, “Ya’alon: I would prefer Islamic State to Iran in Syria,” *Times of Israel*, January 19, 2016, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/yaalon-i-would-prefer-islamic-state-to-iran-in-syria/>.

the kingdom's nascent "Islamic coalition" enter the fray.¹⁹ Such an approach might be constrained by Saudi Arabia's ongoing military commitment in Yemen, but there is no question that the Saudi government has both the resources and the levers to escalate the conflict in Syria should it choose to do so. But whether bluster or meaningful signaling, this rhetoric suggests the degree of Saudi officials' commitment to Assad's ouster in Syria, and their impatience with current Russian-American diplomacy.

It is likely that the Saudi government would work both in the Syrian arena and internationally to sabotage and/or undermine any outcome in Syria that leaves Assad in place. In Afghanistan, the Saudis showed their willingness to use covert action to attack a superpower (Russia) to undermine an outcome they did not like. They would likely escalate support to anti-Assad factions willing to keep fighting in Syria (and there are sufficiently diverse groups that they would undoubtedly find takers), and they would scale up (further) the sectarian rhetoric they have been using to rally Sunnis in the kingdom, in Iraq, and in Syria. In addition, they might escalate the indirect means they have been using to undermine Iran—keeping oil prices low, escalating conflict horizontally (in other arenas outside of Syria such as Yemen, Bahrain, or Lebanon), perhaps fomenting actions by Baluch and Kurdish nationalists in Iran itself, and perhaps tolerating or even enabling extremist Sunni terrorism against Iranian or Shiite targets. Finally, they could seek to undermine an unfavorable deal diplomatically, by mobilizing their Sunni allies and by lobbying in Western capitals and Western media to discredit an undesirable deal.

The "no Assad, no way" coalition

This grouping of states overlaps somewhat with the "No Iran" coalition, a recognition of how inescapably linked are Assad's fate and Iran's future role in Syria. But the question of intention and priority is relevant. The "no Assad" coalition is led by Turkey, Qatar, and also Saudi Arabia (for whose government Assad and Iran are inseparable), and is rooted in three key attitudes:

1. That Bashar Assad's misrule (both domestic repression and his alliance with Iran and Hezbollah) present too great a danger to stand;
2. That no minority-dominated government (and especially not one led by Bashar Assad) can ever again rule Syria peacefully; and thus
3. That stable governance in Syria requires a Sunni-dominated government, likely one that recognizes and incorporates Islamist opposition groups. Of course, most of the anti-Assad militia groups are Islamist, and the largest Islamist opposition to the Assad regime has long been the Muslim Brotherhood.

Each of these governments has additional, reinforcing reasons to see Assad's ouster as a preeminent goal. The Turkish leadership had a close and cooperative partnership with Assad before 2011, and felt betrayed by Assad's rejection of advice to reform and his embrace of violent tactics to try to put down the uprising against him. Qatar has long been a supporter of regional Muslim Brotherhood movements, and Syria's repressed and exiled Muslim Brotherhood has formed a backbone of the opposition since before the war began. Saudi Arabia's late leader, King Abdullah, likewise sought to tutor Bashar Assad and felt betrayed by his slaughter of Sunni dissenters in 2011—but this personal dimension of the Syrian-Saudi hostility has faded since his death. Instead, the kingdom

19 Conversation with senior Saudi official, Washington, DC, June 2016.

today sees Assad as a proxy for Shiite Iran and more broadly for Shiite efforts to oppress Sunni Arabs.

That said, the commitment to Assad's ouster is not necessarily determinative of these actors' actions. For Turkey, domestic crisis and shifting regional dynamics suggest likely shifts in the country's approach to the Syrian war. At first, Turkey's leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, saw the Syrian Brotherhood as fellow Islamist travelers and saw Islamist opposition forces in general as an effective counterweight to Assad. Thus, Erdoğan at first hosted exiled Brotherhood leaders and did little to curtail passage of jihadi funding, weapons, and recruits through Turkey. As the threat from ISIS and the Syrian regime to Turkey's borders grew, Ankara then worked with the United States and coalition forces to push ISIS back from its border and begin to close the frontier to unauthorized traffic.

But as U.S.-led efforts began to rely more and more on Syrian Kurdish militias with close ties to Turkey's old foe, the Kurdish terrorist group the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Ankara's enthusiasm for the U.S.-led campaign has faltered. The Kurds' military success raised alarm in Ankara at the prospect of a Syrian Kurdish autonomous region along its border. I suggested in July 2016 that this might lead Ankara to shift its focus to beating back the challenge of Kurdish empowerment in northern Syria. And indeed, this is what we see now. The Turkish incursion, in support of its favored Free Syrian Army (FSA) forces (largely "moderate" Islamist Sunni Arabs who have been backed by Turkey from the beginning), has forced the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) to retreat east of the Euphrates. Going forward, Turkey will use the FSA forces it is backing as a bulwark against Kurdish territorial advances, and will probably also view the civilian presence in the areas it controls as leverage over Western government policies. A Turkish-sponsored "civilian safe area" in the area of Jarabulus would essentially become Turkish leverage over coalition military operations in northern Syria while the war is ongoing, and over any potential settlement of the conflict. One final (and related) vector of Turkish leverage over conflict outcomes is the refugees it hosts on Turkish territory. If Turkey wants to press for greater Western attention to its interests, it could easily enable greater refugee flows into Europe. Turkey might also push refugees on its territory into a Turkish-protected safe area in northern Syria in order to bolster its leverage there and shape the demographics inside Syria in the event of a political settlement.

Qatar's engagement with the Syrian conflict is more distant and more driven by its broader approach to the post-2011 Arab world. In the early years of the war, private Qatari funding flowed freely to jihadi groups in Syria; recent efforts (taken at the urging of the United States) have largely curtailed that flow. The Qatari leadership continues to believe that Islamist movements represent the future of Arab politics, and that Qatar should support them. At the same time, Qatar's support for Brotherhood movements produced deep rifts with the United Arab Emirates, which both sides have sought to heal but which are, rather, barely papered over. Qatar's new emir, though, relies more than his father did on close relations with the Saudi monarchy, and has been keen to avoid daylight with Riyadh. As is often true, Qatar's policy toward Syria seeks to hedge Doha's bets across its regional relationships, balancing support for Muslim Brotherhood forces with backing for Saudi-supported militias and close cooperation with the United States.

Thus, each of these coalition partners (Saudi Arabia we discussed earlier) have other interests that temper their focus on Assad's ouster, making this coalition in principle the weakest among the four described here. The weak commitment to Assad's ouster amongst the regional governments, however, is compensated for by the strength of this

demand amongst the Syrian opposition, including both those fighting on the ground and those in exile.

Indeed, this is a case where the primacy of battlefield dynamics in determining outcomes becomes clear. The demand for Assad's ouster is bolstered by the unalterable facts that Bashar Assad and his allies have slaughtered as many as 400,000 of Syria's citizens; used chemical weapons against civilians; imprisoned and tortured thousands and displaced millions; and, through Assad's own horrific decisions, broken Syria's government, the Syrian state, and the Syrian nation to bits. Those who demand his ouster as a prerequisite for ending the war are justified in their view that Assad does not have and will not have legitimacy to govern from a majority of Syrians, that his continued rule would be divisive and destructive for Syrian unity and security, and that he should instead face justice for war crimes and crimes against humanity. As a practical matter, and because of all this, many Syrian fighting factions on the ground, and their supporters, will not end their fight short of Assad's ouster. U.S.-Russian concurrence on setting that goal aside will not induce them to cease fire. The only way that inducement might succeed is if Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia relent on their demands and agree to curtail support to rebel factions who continue to fight. This is hard to imagine in the current circumstances.

THE "STRONG CENTRAL GOVERNMENT" COALITION

Some regional actors, including opponents of Assad like Jordan and the United Arab Emirates, as well as more neutral states like Egypt, believe that the most important objective in ending the Syrian war must be the preservation of the Syrian central government, even if that means preserving Bashar Assad in office for some time. If Assad is ousted without an agreed-upon successor in place, as one Arab diplomat explained to me, then Syria will become a failed state like Libya, in which ISIS will have even more space to consolidate and operate, with dire consequences for regional and international security. These states fear the disintegration of Syria even more than they fear an Iranian-dominated Syria. This stance brings this set of regional actors closer to the Russian position in the diplomatic maneuvering in Vienna. While Iran is tied to Assad and the Alawi elite specifically, Russia is not; it is this concern over state collapse and the desire for strong central authority that keeps Russia united with Iran behind Assad.

For Jordan, the priority is driven by the simple fact that ISIS and other jihadi extremist groups present the most direct and urgent threat to the kingdom's stability and security. Jordan has already suffered terrorist attacks from ISIS and its predecessor, al-Qaida in Iraq; and extremist ideology finds fertile ground in the kingdom's more marginalized regions. Jordan's concern for domestic security has also tempered its approach to the refugee crisis: while Amman has accepted a large number of refugees, it has closed the border on occasion to manage the flow and to vet refugees for extremist infiltration. Most recently, it has refused to allow a large number of refugees to cross from Syria into eastern Jordan because of fear of ISIS penetration, and has likewise refused to allow international humanitarian assistance to be provided from its territory to this population. Jordan's concern over ISIS penetration is exacerbated by the focus of U.S.-supported actors on northern Syria, where the anti-ISIS coalition has relied on Kurdish fighters to push the group away from the Turkish border. The Jordanians are concerned that this is driving more jihadi fighters south toward Jordan's border, along with more refugees.

For the Emiratis and Egyptians, the focus on a strong central government is also the result of the lesson these countries drew from the Arab uprisings: that without clear central authority, destabilizing actors (in other words, ISIS and the Muslim Brotherhood, which they see as two sides of the same Islamist coin) will take advantage of more open politics to overwhelm legitimate institutions, carry out terrorism, and impose their own vision for society. For these two governments, holding out for a clear plan for post-Assad succession that holds the country firmly together is their best bulwark against an Islamist-dominated Syria that they believe would be a source of violence and would seek to undermine their own regimes as well.

It is understandable to desire the preservation of Syrian government institutions as a bulwark against anarchy, and to want a central government in Syria with which to work on counterterrorism and postwar reconstruction. The problem with elevating this concern to a primary objective in negotiations is its embedded assumption that any Syrian government based in Damascus will be able to exercise meaningful control over most or all of Syria's territory after rebels and government forces stop fighting one another. That is a faulty assumption, for several reasons.

First, it is extremely unlikely that we will see swift or effective demobilization and disarmament of sub-state fighting factions in favor of a unified Syrian military force. If the central government remains largely in the form and structure of Assad's government, and even more so if Assad himself remains in power, it is hard to imagine rebel groups agreeing to put down their weapons and rely on security provided by the central government. Thus, local militias will remain important providers of local order and also important players in either defeating or enabling extremist groups like ISIS and al-Qaida.

Second, effective governance from Damascus is extremely difficult to imagine, much less implement. The degree of displacement, the extent of physical destruction, and the hardening of sectarian and ethnic divisions due to five years of brutal conflict (and decades of coercive rule before that) all present steep challenges to centralized rule. Those with resources and capacity within local communities will end up being the primary providers of order at the local level—and it is local order, more than a central government, that will enable communities to resist ISIS infiltration. Thus, countries concerned with having effective governance in Syria as a bulwark against extremists need to recognize the value and importance of local governance in any postwar scenario.

In other words, while preserving the Syrian state is a laudable goal, it will not alone achieve the objectives set by those who hold it out as the primary imperative in the political negotiations over the future of Syria.

POLICY ADJUSTMENTS?

The regional interests laid out above present a marked contrast to the focal point of external governments' concerns. It was the rise of ISIS in Syria and Iraq that drove the Obama administration, against its own inclinations, to recommit American blood and treasure on the ground in the Middle East in August of 2014. ISIS' recruitment of thousands of European Muslims, and the all-too-evident threat the group poses to the continent, have generated escalating commitments from many European states to the anti-terror fight in Iraq and Syria. Even for Russia, it is the spillover threat posed by Sunni extremism (along with preservation of its military access to the Mediterranean, and an opportunity to challenge Washington) that is of the greatest concern in Syria.

What's clear, then, is that the United States and its allies outside the region face a gap in priorities with their regional partners in the anti-ISIS coalition: for the extraregional actors, ISIS is the highest priority; for Western-backed regional actors, Iran is the highest priority. These clashing priorities have both constrained regional governments' support for the anti-ISIS struggle, and led them to behave in ways that on occasion undermine both the anti-ISIS struggle and the diplomatic efforts to end the Syrian war.

The fate of Bashar Assad is not perhaps of primary concern from the perspective of the U.S. and other Western governments. But counterterrorism is, and that is also an interest shared (in principle) with Moscow. One avenue for exploration in the diplomatic talks on Syria's future might be to shift the discussion away from Assad's fate and toward the question of decentralization. Western governments could press regional actors in the "strong central government" coalition (as well as Russia) to relax their fixation on Syria's central government and who runs it as a counterterrorism goal, and to accept the principle that *a significant degree of decentralization and support for localized governance inside Syria will be necessary to preserve the peace, carry out reconstruction, and defeat ISIS*. Likewise, the Syrian opposition and those states demanding Assad's ouster as a precondition for peace must recognize that they have even more to gain from insisting on decentralization and local autonomy than they do from Assad's departure from power. They might even be able to trade their current demand for Assad's immediate departure against robust assurances for empowerment of local authority, release of detainees, and internationally guaranteed transitional justice.

Diplomatic efforts could potentially attract more support from Israel and Saudi Arabia if those efforts take greater account of the destabilizing implications of an Iranian-dominated Syrian government, even a rump government that does not control all of Syrian territory. A focus on constructing a political settlement that limits Iran's influence in postwar Syria could induce greater coherence among partners currently divided over the fate of Assad; and it could prevent a situation in which Western-allied governments trade the threat of ISIS in Syria for the threat of Iranian-sponsored terrorism and subversion emanating from Syria.

ANNEX: PAST EXPERIENCES IN PEACE IMPLEMENTATION

A subset of the regional and extra-regional players—Russia, Turkey, and (to a limited degree) Iran—have had limited past experiences with involvement or interference in post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation efforts. However, these are not a definitive guide to likely behavior in Syria, for two reasons. States act inconsistently; and few of the examples of these countries' post-conflict reconstruction efforts were in countries so close to their core interests as Syria.

In what follows, we outline the near-historical repertoire of the way these various states have acted, but we make no claim that these actions are likely in Syria. To a degree, they indicate available toolkits and capabilities, though those can, of course, change. To a degree, they indicate attitudes. The extent to which these states have seen themselves as part of a wider cooperative endeavor to reconstruct countries after war, versus seeking narrowly to protect their interests and those of their clients. There is a range of both behaviors in these settings.

One clear issue that comes through from interlocutors and is supported by past behavior, is that these countries are not likely to play any kind of constructive role in implementation of a political settlement that does not meet their narrowly defined interests. That is, unless this is in the context of an overwhelming counter force, with broad regional and international support. The odds instead are of an approach to post-conflict implementation that looks more like war by other means, or a continuation of proxy warfare into the political and economic arenas. If the settlement is, as it most likely will be, a compromise, they are less likely to seek implementation than to mount a later-stage retrenchment effort.

Nonetheless, we can look case by case at these countries' past behavior.

For **Russia**, the near parallels are in Kosovo and in Georgia, and perhaps in Moldova. All three contexts were ones where Russia deployed military forces, as well as having engaged in various other post-conflict implementation efforts. The balance of these efforts is, in large part, a factor of the relative balance between their military force, and the seriousness and scale of external Western or U.N. forces.

Georgia. In 1994, during tensions between the government of Georgia and a would-be breakaway province of Abkhazia, the U.N. sought to mediate an end to hostilities.

Agreement came with Russian diplomatic engagement and the decision to deploy several thousand troops into the territory, under the guise of a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peacekeeping force (of which Russian troops comprised the overwhelming bulk). Under substantial Western pressure, and after negotiations in the U.N. Security Council, this led to a series of trade-offs, in which Russia eventually agreed to form part of a wider deployment. This was a highly unusual arrangement, in which the U.N. mounted an observer group to oversee not just the conflict but the activities of the CIS peacekeeping force itself.

Kosovo. This was a more audacious, albeit limited, Russian involvement. Even after NATO had begun the Kosovo operations, Russia intervened belatedly with around a 250 troops (redeployed from peacekeeping duties in Bosnia) to secure the airport at Pristina. In so doing, Moscow gave itself a bargaining chip, and served to protect its client Serb political allies. Russia was then insistent on holding a senior position within the U.N. mission that led the reconstruction. Over the subsequent years, Russia used its position in the Security Council and its position inside the U.N. mission to protect its allies within Kosovo, and as leverage on the U.N. reconstruction effort. Ultimately, however, Russia was not able to substantially distort the course of the reconstruction effort.

Moldova. When the Transnistrian Republic sought to break away from Moldova, Russia deployed substantial military forces to stop it. Partial negotiations ensued, and again, eventually under substantial Western pressure, those negotiations proceeded, and Russia pulled back to some degree. However, to this day, Russia remains a dominant military presence in the Transnistrian Republic, and has not ceded much ground to the West or the U.N. on reconstruction.

Of course, Russia also routinely plays into the negotiations on U.N. Security Council action over post-conflict implementation. This has been of relatively limited influence, however, given the reality that U.N. Security Council mandates are heavily interpreted by the secretary-general and special representatives on the ground, meaning that the ability of the Council to shape those efforts is modest. At best, Russia has been able to narrow

down the scope for protection of civilians language within mandates for peacekeeping operations. It has played a small role, whether constructive or unproductive, in genuine post-conflict political and economic efforts on the ground in main missions.

Iran. There are really only two past instances of Iranian engagement in post-conflict implementation; both are very specific, and they suggest radically different lessons.

Afghanistan. Despite a heavy NATO and U.S. presence, Afghanistan was largely a source of cooperation for the U.N., and for the West. Iran's interests in Afghanistan had little to do with this precise nature of the political and economic settlement, and were much more about the flow of drugs from southeastern Afghanistan into Iran. Virtually every U.S. and U.N. representative reported extensive Iranian intelligence and economic cooperation in dealing with the drug trafficking.

Iraq provides the counter-story: an arena in which, despite substantial U.S. and NATO presence, Iran has used armed units, special forces, intelligence services, ties through religious networks, proxies, political bribery, political pressure, economic investment, and diplomatic engagement to shore up a pro-Iran government, and preserve its interests on the ground. This has been a substantial, extensive, and largely successful endeavor to secure an Iranian interest in Baghdad.

Based on its current behavior and interests, it seems evident that Iran will act in Syria more analogously to how it has acted in Iraq than in Afghanistan.

Turkey. Turkey has a growing repertoire of tools for engagement and a set of cumulative experiences. These include:

Kosovo. Turkey comprised an important part of the NATO force that was sent into Kosovo after the halt of NATO bombing. They were a largely constructive force, though the tasks that fell to them were of modest significance. They secured and supported reconstruction, including economically in the largely Turkic sections of Kosovo, bringing the Turkish private sector and Turkish civil society to bear in a largely constructive way, while maintaining their interests in protecting Turkic minorities in the Kosovo territories.

Somaliland. Turkey has in past years led diplomatic efforts to secure stability and reconciliation in Somaliland, and to solidify peaceful relations across the Somaliland-Somalia de facto boundary. This is linked to substantial oil trusts that Turkey has off the coast of Somalia, but it is being conducted in a relatively benign diplomatic and political manner.

Iran. Together with Brazil, Turkey sought to secure a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear dispute, deploying high-level diplomatic and political capacity, in an effort that nearly succeeded. Indeed, it succeeded in the sense that the countries reached what was called the Tehran Declaration before the United States, and then ultimately the Security Council, blocked it.

Africa. Turkey has begun an extensive effort to spread influence and protect Turkish minorities, but more to project its image and its economic interests across the African continent. This is to be done using Turkish NGOs, foundations, educational institutions, and the private sector.

All of this being said, none of these prior cases are likely to be a particularly useful guide to Turkish behavior in Syria. At this stage, Turkey has a large-scale troop presence in Syria, larger than any other deployment they have had since the end of the WWII. The Kurdish question makes this an existential one for Ankara's internal democratic and political balance. The tense relationship between the United States and Russia, two geopolitical players with whom Turkey has tense relations, weighs heavily in the balance of Turkey's actual role on the ground.

APPENDIX THREE

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PLANNING FOR RECONCILIATION IN A POST-CONFLICT SYRIA: AUTHORITARIAN LEGACIES AND LESSONS LEARNED

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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps more so than any other task, designing and implementing a successful and comprehensive reconciliation process is essential to both ending civil conflict and preventing future violence. Traditionally, national reconciliation is intended to secure four goals: **truth-seeking, redress of grievances, accountability, and institutional reforms**. These four goals broadly align with the four principles for dealing with the past as articulated by U.N. Special Rapporteur Louis Joinet in 1997: “the right to know, the right to justice, the right to reparations, and the guarantee of non-recurrence.”²⁰ Often, those engaged in supporting reconciliation focus on the concept of transitional justice—ensuring legal justice (or rule of law); distributive justice (addressing structural and systemic injustices); and rectificatory justice (addressing violent crimes).²¹ Yet reconciliation involves more than accounting for the past—it is a complex process that seeks to change the normative framework of political leaders, former combatants, and individual citizens.

Reconciliation is also an ongoing and lengthy process. Even many years down the road, societies should not consider themselves “reconciled.” Rather, a successful reconciliation program must take both short-term, immediate steps to end conflict and establish institutional mechanisms to promote stable and effective governance, as well as long-term, generational steps that build momentum to move society over the tipping point wherein political actors, civil society, and everyday citizens are invested in the continued success of the transition, and preventing the resumption of violence becomes a goal deeply embedded within the national consciousness.

While the Syrian conflict continues to rage on, reconciliation need not wait. There are steps that can be taken to prepare the public for a post-conflict environment, even in

20 As quoted in Swisspeace, “A Conceptual Framework for Dealing with the Past,” (Bern: Swisspeace, 2016), http://www.swisspeace.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/Media/Publications/Essentials/Essential_2_2016_EN.pdf.

21 Rama Mani, *Beyond Retribution: Seeking Justice in the Shadows of War* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2002).

the absence of a peaceful settlement. Additionally, it would behoove the international community to devote serious thought now to the institutional arrangements that will best provide security, rule of law, and effective governance following the end of hostilities. A society undergoing reconciliation is a ticking time bomb with a high potential for retributive violence and a return to conflict. Attempting to create a plan for reconciliation under these circumstances can be dangerous and ill-fated.

This paper begins to think through the issues related to reconciliation in Syria. It begins with lessons from the MENA region to describe some possible paths for reconciliation in Syria both in the near term as well as in a post-conflict environment. It then outlines the key short-term and long-term objectives for reconciliation in Syria. The paper next addresses two possible scenarios: an Assad victory and a negotiated, more equitable political settlement, providing examples of possible reconciliation programs and providing options for how reconciliation could be drawn into an early U.N. mission.

LESSONS FROM THE MENA REGION

While the MENA region is ripe with conflict, there are few examples of successful reconciliation processes. Nevertheless, some MENA states have made attempts to either address abuses from past conflicts or proactively heal divides to help end current conflicts, with lessons that can be instructive for the Syrian case. While we recognize that there are other relevant cases of reconciliation processes outside of the MENA region, by and large the Syrians who are thinking about reconciliation are focused on cases from their own region. Furthermore, there exist a variety of Syrian track two processes that contain elements of reconciliation. The lessons from these processes have been incorporated into the recommendations in this paper.

Goal 1: Truth-seeking

Morocco: The region's first truth commission

Morocco was the first country in the Arab world to establish a truth and reconciliation commission to address past abuses. Shortly after ascending the throne, King Mohammed VI both abolished torture and established the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (ERC) to address the so-called “years of lead”—the 1960s and 1970s—during which his father’s government carried out numerous human rights abuses against suspected opposition figures, particularly intellectuals and leftist political figures.²² The commission came about through a combination of top-down political will and bottom-up pressure. Moroccan human rights organizations, former political prisoners, and victims’ families were not satisfied by the king’s initial attempts at righting past wrongs, leading three Moroccan civil society groups to hold a national symposium during which they drafted a plan for a truth commission that they submitted to the king.

The Moroccan case is instructive for Syria on many levels. First, it managed to walk the line between revenge and justice. The commission was not given the power to name individuals as guilty of committing abuses, rather it could only name institutional abusers. This did not satisfy all Moroccans—some of whom took part in a parallel NGO-led effort that named perpetrators—but it did allow Morocco to move forward. It also took a broad approach, investigating abuses from Morocco’s independence in 1956

22 For more details on the work of the commission see: International Center for Transitional Justice, “Truth and Reconciliation in Morocco,” (New York: International Center for Transitional Justice, 2009), <https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-Morocco-TRC-2009-English.pdf>.

up until the death of King Hassan II in 1999. The commission was tasked with both recommending ways to compensate victims and their families, and to symbolically recognize what had occurred to prevent the future recurrence of violence.

A criticism of the Moroccan approach is that the ERC did not have statutory powers to require state agencies to comply with its recommendations. It therefore served solely an advisory role. This is not surprising in Morocco's political context (wherein the king retains veto power over all decisions). But in the case of Syria, a successful reconciliation process should include some sort of mechanism to ensure the commission's recommendations are enshrined in law.

Morocco's reconciliation effort was largely successful, in part because it came about during a time of transition between leaders, but within the context of regime continuity. Should Assad remain in power, he must be convinced to both sanction a truth and reconciliation process and accept recommendations from citizens via civil society organizations for the contents of that process, which he may be unlikely to do. As the Moroccan case proved, political will is insufficient without public buy-in (and vice versa).

An additional key to Morocco's success was the king's legitimacy. First, King Hassan granted a basic level of legitimacy to the reconciliation process before he died by approving the establishment of a body to compensate victims of past human rights abuses. Thus, when his son, King Mohammed, took up the mantle, he was seen not as acting against his father, but rather as carrying out his father's dying wish. Second, the Moroccan monarch is unique in his dual role as both head of state and commander of the faithful (*emir al-mu'minin*). Regardless of the eventual political settlement in Syria, it will be far more challenging to establish the type of legitimacy afforded to the Moroccan monarch. Thus, it would be ideal that should Assad not retain power, he bless the reconciliation process—however superficially—to give his followers the political cover to participate in the process.

Another lesson of the Moroccan experience is the idea of a communal reparations program. In order to address systematic and historic inequalities between Morocco's regions, government officials selected 11 regions to receive both socio-economic development assistance and symbolic acknowledgment of past mistreatment. The idea of recognizing "victim regions" in addition to individual victims was carried over into Tunisia's transitional justice program, as is discussed in more detail below. While Morocco still experiences a wide disparity between its rural and urban areas and concomitant unrest, as evidenced in the wave of protests in al-Hoceima in November 2016,²³ the government has taken some steps to address these regional disparities and the concept of targeted regional reparations could also be applied in the Syrian context.

Goal 2: Redress of grievances

Algeria: Reconciliation by decree

Unlike Morocco, which carried out a relatively successful transitional justice process through its Equity and Reconciliation Commission, Algeria undertook a superficial attempt at reconciliation that has failed to adequately deal with the horrific civil war that

23 Sarah Yerkes, "Why Morocco's protests won't usher in another Arab Spring," *Markaz* (blog), *Brookings Institution*, November 2, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/11/02/why-moroccos-protests-wont-usher-in-another-arab-spring/>.

resulted in about 150,000 deaths and at least 7,000 disappeared. The explanation of Algeria's attempt at reconciliation that follows explains how not to go about attempting a redress of grievances. Algeria's reconciliation came about through a carefully controlled, top-down process that has failed to provide any real justice or redress of grievances. The process, which was based largely on the Moroccan ERC, is so state-controlled that some analysts have questioned whether it can truly be called a reconciliation process at all.

President Abdelaziz Bouteflika has personally overseen most of the reconciliation process. He came to power in 1999 promising to bring social peace to Algeria and had his hand in a variety of reconciliation measures. In 1999, Algeria passed the Law on Civil Concord that granted amnesty to insurgents willing to give up their arms, provided they had not been directly involved in massacres, rapes, or murder. It also provided partial amnesty including limited sentences for those who had carried out horrific crimes. This included members of the military and police, some of whom were accused of gross human rights violations. This replaced the 1995 Clemency Law, which gave offenders clemency for their actions during the civil war but did not provide amnesty.

Bouteflika was also instrumental in establishing a commission in 2005 to investigate the thousands of disappearances. Because the commission did not publicly release its report, no one was ever held accountable for the disappearances, for which the commission determined that the state was not responsible. Families of the disappeared were persuaded to accept compensation from the state (at around \$10,000 per family) with an agreement to suspend investigation into the disappearances. Additionally, Algeria's Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation, which was approved by the public in a referendum and made into the Law on National Reconciliation, pardoned 8,500 armed rebels and exonerated state security forces, drawing the ire of the international human rights community. In fact, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the International Federation for Human Rights were so disturbed by Algeria's blanket immunity policy that they issued their first ever joint statement. The Algerian process did not contain any sort of truth commission or investigative mechanism, or provide for security sector or other state reforms to guard against future crimes. Furthermore, Bouteflika regularly superseded the approved legislation, issuing presidential decrees that secretly granted amnesty or exonerated some insurgents.

As a result of Algeria's top-down reconciliation process, many individuals who took part in the civil war continued to occupy key positions of power even a decade after the end of the war. And some were active in business and politics. And for those individuals who did face the courts, the charges often did not reflect reality, with many found guilty for crimes such as insubordination rather than torture or murder, which forced them out of positions of influence, but did not provide any real justice for victims or their families.

Because the victims and their families lacked an official mechanism by which to demand justice, civil society stepped in with a parallel reconciliation effort. Several civil society organizations, many of which were run by family members of victims, joined together in a conference in Geneva in 2009 and regularly protested the Algerian state's handling of the reconciliation process and demanded justice and compensation for their suffering. This effort was supported by international human rights organizations.

Algeria was able to carry out this method of reconciliation by decree because of the deep authoritarian nature of the state. The judiciary is not free and can be manipulated by the state. And the Charter of National Reconciliation and Peace outlaws criticism of the state in the context of the civil war, with a punishment of three to five years in

prison and a substantial fine. Should Assad and his camp be victorious in Syria we could expect an outcome similar to Algeria. Assad could undertake the same superficial measures as Bouteflika to give the appearance of transitional justice and reconciliation while ensuring that his supporters do not face prosecution.

Goal 3: Accountability

Iraq: Relying on international experts to overcome a credibility gap

Iraq has undergone a series of failed and aborted reconciliation processes since the fall of Saddam Hussein. The 2006 “Mecca Document,” for example, the outcome of a negotiated reconciliation process between Sunnis and Shiites, was repeatedly violated by all sides. Yet reconciliation in Iraq is crucial both to providing stability and social peace and to countering ISIS and other extremist groups. ISIS’ origins, in fact, can be traced in part to the failure to reconcile Sunnis and Shiites in the early 2000s. Using reconciliation as a bulwark against ISIS is important in the Syrian case as well, where bridging divides and raising up previously disenfranchised communities can help reduce sectarianism and address the isolation and frustration that fuels ISIS recruitment.

One challenge for reconciliation in Iraq is political credibility, which has hampered Iraq’s ability to undertake a process of accountability. Iraq’s reconciliation process is overseen by the National Reconciliation Committee with a direct line to the Iraqi leadership via an advisor to the prime minister for reconciliation. However, Iraq’s current prime minister, Haider al-Abadi, has been criticized for lacking the necessary political support to carry out reconciliation.²⁴ While Abadi has demonstrated a genuine desire to prioritize reconciliation, he has been sidetracked by more pressing security and economic challenges, and is plagued by the poisonous sectarian atmosphere left over from the prior government. Furthermore, it is very difficult for a top-down reconciliation process, in a country still grappling with tremendous sectarian cleavages, to gain the necessary buy-in from all parties.

To address this challenge, Iraq has relied heavily on the work of international experts, such as the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), in designing and implementing its reconciliation program. Syria could reap tremendous benefits from this model, particularly in the immediate aftermath of conflict, when it is challenging to identify local experts that can appeal to different communities previously at war with one another. However, to be successful in the long-term, Syria’s reconciliation process must earn the trust and buy-in of the Syrian people from all parties to the conflict. It cannot be seen as being imposed from the outside. To that end, USIP identified a key civil society partner on the ground in Iraq, Sanad for Peacebuilding. Furthermore, USIP regularly works with a variety of Iraqi civil society and government bodies to carry out its work.

The cornerstone of USIP’s work in Iraq has been facilitated dialogues between Sunnis and Shiite tribes in areas that USIP has identified as particularly vulnerable to a return to violence. Dialogues have been carried out at the local and national level, as small, localized dialogues can be more effective at diffusing smaller-scale tensions before they erupt. USIP also trains local leaders to be facilitators. Local facilitators can be preferable as they are more invested in the outcome of the dialogue, but they must be credible and viewed as neutral by dialogue participants. Dialogues need not necessarily be between different ethnic or religious groups. In Iraq, USIP has carried out justice

24 Ben Connable, “Iraq Reconciliation Requires American Help.”

and security dialogues between citizens and law enforcement officials to rebuild trust between the two.

A second major challenge in Iraq is deciding who comes to the table. This will certainly be a challenge in Syria as well. Often, reconciliation processes are open to anyone without “blood on their hands,” but determining exactly who that entails can be both logistically challenging and politically dangerous. In Iraq, for example, there is often a distinction between those who have Iraqi and those who have American blood on their hands, with the former being excluded and the latter included in reconciliation discussions. This is particularly challenging in the case of ISIS—determining who were willing collaborators and combatants, and who were coerced into participation. Syria should allow for open dialogue on this question and come to a consensus early on. While not everyone is likely to accept the definition, it is important to have one and stand by it.

Iraqi reconciliation still has a long way to go, but the few lessons learned to date are very applicable in the Syrian case—relying on external actors for support and marrying top-down and bottom-up approaches to create the most effective and credible reconciliation process possible.

Israel-Palestine: Improving contact in the absence of peace

The Israeli-Palestinian case is unlike the Moroccan, Algerian, and Tunisian cases in that it is an ongoing conflict that is unlikely to end any time soon. Nevertheless, there are many positive and negative examples of attempts at rehabilitation, memorialization, commemoration, and education surrounding the conflict, primarily driven by Israeli, Palestinian, and international civil society organizations, that offer some lessons on how to proactively heal divides during conflict and how to prepare the Syrian public for an eventual peaceful settlement. With a conflict that has raged for generations, Israelis and Palestinians have participated in a wide variety of coexistence and conflict management programming targeting individuals and groups from every demographic group. While these programs have not achieved their ultimate goal—a peaceful resolution to the conflict—they nevertheless offer some important lessons for the Syrian conflict.

First, like Syria, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is, at its core, an asymmetric conflict. Research has shown that to be successful, attempts at bridging the gap between Israelis and Palestinians must “produce equality and cooperation between groups embedded in a reality of conflict and asymmetry.”²⁵ This is no easy task. Virtually every interaction between Israelis and Palestinians reinforces the asymmetric nature of the conflict beginning with the cumbersome process Palestinians must go through to physically meet with Israelis. These same types of physical constraints will not be replicated in the Syrian case, but the overriding atmosphere of asymmetry will be there, regardless of the political settlement. Because of this asymmetry, the biggest obstacle to Israeli-Palestinian dialogue at the grassroots level is the “anti-normalization” campaign. Many Palestinians, even those who support a negotiated two-state solution to the conflict, reject cross-border coexistence programming on the basis that it “normalizes” the occupation. The line of argument is that by developing tools and practices to get along under the current political situation prolongs the status quo. It is easy to imagine a similar argument in the Syrian context. The anti-Assad camp could reject any attempts

25 Ifat Maoz, “Does contact work in protracted asymmetrical conflict? Appraising 20 years of reconciliation-aimed encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians,” *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 1 (2011): 115-125.

at dialogue with the pro-Assad camp prior to a political settlement. Thus, reconciliation programming should anticipate a “anti-normalization”-type backlash and devise methods to address it.

Second, particularly during times of violence (such as the second intifada or the Gaza war), NGOs have scaled back or otherwise adjusted their programming to the situation on the ground. However, the most successful NGOs continued to carry out programming where possible, even under the most challenging circumstances. One organization, One Voice, operates on a parallel engagement model. With chapters in Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, and abroad, One Voice carries out intra-societal dialogue and coexistence programming. They have carried out a few cross-border events, bringing their Israeli and Palestinian chapters together for a conference or a meeting, but these have been subject to protest by the anti-normalization crowd. The lesson from One Voice for Syria is the importance of creating a space for Syria’s various ethnic and religious groups to engage in dialogue about the idea of reconciliation amongst themselves, without the added pressure of convening Syrians from different groups. This is one type of programming that can continue at a local level regardless of the political situation and can help individual groups process various events, such as a return to violence. However, intragroup programming alone is not successful in achieving the goals of reconciliation.

Another successful model is the U.S. State Department’s International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP), which brings foreign leaders to the United States for short-term visits to connect with their American counterparts. One specific program (“Peace Partners”) brings Israelis and Palestinians on a joint program to the United States. This allows participants to interact in a freer setting and with a common goal, such as bringing Israeli and Palestinian university deans to the United States to meet with American university deans. A dedicated program to bring Syrians from different ethnic and religious groups outside of Syria, such as to the United Kingdom, could begin even prior to the end of conflict.

In general, when designing reconciliation programming in the absence of settlement, it can be more effective to develop programs that bring together people from different groups to carry out practical tasks. One example from the Israeli-Palestinian context, the Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME), for example, brings together Israelis and Palestinians from villages on either side of the Jordan River to work on Jordan River clean up. This program provides a direct benefit to participants and has no overt political goal. There are numerous examples of this type of programming in the Israeli-Palestinian context, from joint sports teams to joint art and cultural programs, to a joint radio station.

Third, programming must span the spectrum from intragroup initiatives to bilateral dialogue to engagement with skeptics or other rejectionist voices. In the Syrian context there will certainly be loud rejectionists—those who oppose any political settlement. Frequently, coexistence programming ignores these individuals and groups—they are seen as an obstacle to reconciliation and often vocally reject participation even if they are invited. However, in the Israeli-Palestinian case, a few NGOs have successfully incorporated rejectionists (particularly far-right Israeli settlers) through secret, unpublicized programming. One program brings settlers and Palestinian villagers who live in adjacent communities together simply to meet each other. While this program has not had a tremendous impact on the conflict overall, the participants from both sides report that prior to this engagement they had never met anyone from the other side.

The idea of secrecy is not recommended for broad use, as one of the important aspects of coexistence programming is widely publicizing the events and their results to add to the positive narrative of intergroup engagement. However, another non-public Israeli-Palestinian program could be replicated in Syria. A negotiation-based NGO brings together mid-level Israeli and Palestinian government officials (along with foreign diplomats serving in the region) for joint negotiations training. The program is highly secretive, protecting the participants from potential backlash within their communities. This type of program could take place in Syria a few years after the end of conflict, bringing together rising leaders representing various ethnic and religious groups or various local councils for joint skills-building with the hope that these leaders will go on to serve influential positions within the future Syrian government.

Fourth, Israeli and Palestinian NGOs have done a great job of engaging the international community—particularly the American and European Jewish communities and the Palestinian diaspora community—to help amplify their message and build credibility. This will be crucial in the Syrian case—reconciliation programming must both reach out to the Syrian diaspora in the United States and Europe, but also to the refugee population across the broader Middle East. NGOs should develop programming targeting refugee communities both to aid in their eventual return to Syria but also in better integrating them within their host countries, as Syrian refugees are likely to remain outside of Syria for some time following the end of the conflict.

Finally, many Israeli and Palestinian NGOs have replicated models from the Irish conflict, visiting Northern Ireland to inspire hope amongst Israeli and Palestinian participants, and inviting former combatants or peacemakers to consult with them. The Syrian conflict would benefit from exposure to other successfully resolved violent conflicts (such as Northern Ireland or Rwanda) to inspire hope in those dedicated to reconciliation and to convince skeptics.

Goal 4: Institutionalization of reforms

Tunisia: Innovative measures to ensure inclusion

Tunisia's post-Arab Spring transition has incorporated reconciliation in a relatively effective and successful manner. The Tunisian case offers positive, instructive lessons across a variety of reconciliation goals including both truth-seeking and redress of grievances. This section will focus on Tunisia's attempt to institutionalize the reconciliation process to prevent a recurrence of conflict. The thoughtful and deliberate way in which the Tunisian government and civil society have handled reconciliation offers some constructive lessons for Syria. However, Tunisia did not experience a violent conflict (or even a violent revolution) and therefore faced far fewer obstacles than Syria will face in designing its reconciliation process. Because Tunisia was not tasked with ending a civil conflict, it was able to prioritize the political transition over reconciliation efforts. The Tunisian government chose to adopt a delayed approach that allowed for citizen and civil society input but also, at times, tested the patience of the Tunisian public. In Syria, it may be preferable to focus on reconciliation first and democracy second, as forcing elections onto a fragile Syrian citizenry could exacerbate divides and delay the reconciliation process.

The Tunisian reconciliation process stands out for a variety of reasons. While it has not been an entirely smooth process, it has adopted several unique features that could be reproduced in the Syrian context. First, the entire reconciliation process was a collaborative effort of government and civil society. Civil society (with the support of the international

community) was the main driver of the early stages of reconciliation. In Syria, civil society will likely be better equipped (with the proper international support) than any post-conflict government to begin much of the reconciliation process, particularly drafting laws, designing dialogue programs and planning for the long term.

Tunisian civil society was inclusive in its process of organizing conferences and seminars throughout the country to ensure voices from the rural interior were represented along with those from the coast and in designing capacity-building sessions for government officials as well as the media and NGOs to impress upon them the importance of transitional justice. In effect, civil society wrote the law on transitional justice, which was then adopted by Tunisia's government and enshrined in the country's first post-revolution constitution. Again, given the likely limitations to the Syrian government's capacity in the immediate post-conflict period, Syrian civil society could follow a similar model in drafting the transitional justice legislation and developing the appropriate enforcement mechanisms to be later adopted by the government.

The Tunisian reconciliation process was also the first to address violent crimes and economic crimes within a single body, recognizing the impact that financial abuses (corruption, embezzlement, economic discrimination) have had on the Tunisian public and the degree to which they contributed to the 2011 uprising. This model has won praise from the international human rights community and could be replicated in Syria.

Most recently, Tunisia's Truth and Dignity Commission (Instance Vérité et Dignité, or IVD) took a remarkable step of holding publicly televised hearings in November 2016. Victims and families of victims who suffered under former Presidents Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Habib Bourguiba publicly recounted their experiences. The hearings were also aired on Tunisian radio and via the internet in English, Arabic, and French so that Tunisians and others across the globe could witness the testimony. The public recounting provided victims and their families with a massive platform and allowed their testimony to be recorded in Tunisia's historical archives.

The Tunisian reconciliation process has not been entirely smooth. First, the process has, at times, been hijacked by Tunisia's political leaders. One of the issues facing Tunisia's progress is the continued presence of some former regime figures, including Tunisia's democratically-elected, 89-year-old president who served multiple roles in the prior regime. The inclusion of financial crimes within Tunisia's transitional justice legislation is seen as a threat to many former regime figures, prompting President Beji Caid Essebsi to devise his own "economic reconciliation law" that would provide amnesty to former regime officials and business executives who committed financial crimes or misused public funds as long as they paid back a certain amount of money to the Tunisian government. The law has received tremendous pushback from Tunisian and international civil society organizations but may still pass, thereby negating many of the most innovative provisions of Tunisia's transitional justice law. This highlights the need for Syria's legislative process to provide mechanisms that prevent government interference in the transitional justice process. Any legislation must proactively reject attempts to override it.

KEY OBJECTIVES FOR RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation entails both short-term and long-term objectives. These should not be viewed as distinct phases. Rather, the two bleed into each other as work on short-term objectives helps set the stage for long-term goals. **Short-term objectives** both create

the conditions to sustain the end of conflict and prepare the ground for the long-term work of reconciliation. These objectives include:

- **Establishing basic security and basic rule of law.** Prioritizing legal justice and the rule of law in the immediate aftermath of the cessation of hostilities both sends a powerful signal and can provide stability to assist additional institutional reform. Establishing rule of law and a functioning legal system early on is also essential to the later stage of restorative justice. Ideally, rule of law is overseen by the national government. However, in the Syrian case, particularly in the short term, rule of law will likely be best exercised at the local level by municipal councils. Any legal systems put in place must contain mechanisms to prevent corruption in the short term. The danger in designing a locally administered justice system is accidentally empowering parallel government structures that act as substitutes for central government. Additionally, care must be taken to avoid recreating the regional disparities that fueled the Syrian conflict by ensuring each local council receives an equitable share of resources and abides by the same agreed-upon rules and procedures.
- **Demobilization and disarmament of non-state militias.** As an initial matter, non-state militias will be active in securing cease-fires, policing local areas, and preventing reprisal violence. But the aim should be quickly to replace local militias with civilian-authorized and -overseen local police and judicial officials who can be integrated into formal governance structures.
- **Preserving evidence of crimes.** All parties to end-of-conflict agreements must make commitments to abjure from retributive violence and to turn over evidence, persons, prisoners, and other relevant material to the designated transitional justice authorities. The end-of-conflict agreements should specify at least the basic principles that will govern transitional justice arrangements, and should designate an authoritative mechanism by which transitional justice processes and bodies will be fleshed out and a target timeline to do so.
- **Improving contact between warring groups.** The idea of increasing the quality and quantity of contacts between religious, ethnic, and political groups is based on the contact hypothesis—the idea that under certain conditions,²⁶ contact between different groups can reduce negative stereotypes and prejudices and promote tolerance. This sort of contact both helps heal wounds fresh from conflict and build strong bridges between groups to prevent future conflict. This work can begin prior to the cessation of conflict and helps prepare the public for an eventual political settlement.

Long-term objectives seek to prevent the resumption of violence, create sustainable political institutions, enshrine human rights protections, and institutionalize normative changes that promote equality and tolerance. These objectives include:

26 These conditions are: “(1) equal status of both groups in the contact situation; (2) ongoing personal interaction between individuals from both groups; (3) cooperation in a situation of mutual dependence, in which members of both groups work together toward a common goal; and (4) institutional support – consensus among the authorities and the relevant institutions about norms that support equality.” See Ifat Maoz, “Does contact work in protracted asymmetrical conflict?” Maoz’s article also describes four different models of improving contact, describing the strengths and weaknesses of each one.

- **Building trust.** A lasting political settlement requires horizontal and vertical trust among key actors. Full transparency of the reconciliation process will help assuage public concerns. Without providing an explicit mechanism for public input (either directly or through civil society), particularly for citizens from traditionally disadvantaged ethnic groups or regions, the reconciliation process has the potential to re-emphasize old grievances.
- **Security sector reform.** Planning the necessary reforms to the security sector can begin prior to the end of conflict, but carrying out such reforms should be a deliberative, relatively long-term process. The security sector reform process involves many steps, including creating civilian oversight of the security apparatus, developing checks and balances, preventing stovepipes between military and police, training security forces on spotting corruption and human rights abuses, establishing whistleblower protections, and developing a thorough lustration process. The implementation of the lustration process can begin in the short term. In Syria, such a process must consider individuals and vet based on self-reporting and available documentation, along with gathered evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Lustration based on categories or associations, such as banning all previous government employees or all previous Baath Party members, is both unrealistic in a country as authoritarian as Syria was, and also likely to reinforce divisions rather than advance reconciliation. Finally, such sweeping lustration rules would rob the country of far too many knowledgeable professionals needed for reconstruction and development.
- **Establishing transitional justice.** The post-conflict government in Syria will need to design a comprehensive transitional justice process that both collects and preserves victim testimony and creates a neutral mechanism to adjudicate claims of abuse, ideally enshrined in a new constitution approved by public referendum. Transitional justice should examine both violent crimes (i.e. human rights abuses such as ethnic cleansing, hate crimes, involuntary displacement, forced conscription, hunger, and disease) as well as financial and other nonviolent crimes such as corruption, discrimination, or lack of access to education. Transitional justice bodies must also determine appropriate forms of compensation for victims. International mediators can play a role in helping to establish the proper transitional justice mechanisms, but in order to earn the trust of the Syrian public, the process must be carried out by Syrians under the direction of (or at least with the blessing of) the Syrian authorities.
- **Ensuring distributive justice.** Mechanisms such as a truth and reconciliation commission must examine and provide accountability for the real and perceived socio-economic, cultural, and political injustices that plagued Syria prior to the civil war. The structural and systemic injustices perpetrated by the Assad regime, particularly against Sunni Arabs and Kurds, should be examined by a neutral authority with the power to both hear grievances and recommend financial or other forms of compensation at the individual, group, or communal level.
- **Trauma healing.** The donor community should help provide psychosocial support to help conflict victims heal both physically and mentally. While this should begin in the immediate term, it is a long-term process that must continue as long as the transitional justice process is in place. Victims and their families will continue to suffer psychological effects far past the cessation of conflict and thus sufficient resources should be designated to keep psychosocial trauma centers operating long past the end of conflict. Trauma recovery centers also serve as a constructive

environment through which to channel anger and grievance during the healing process, as a bulwark against extremist groups that are eager to capitalize on that frustration and anger.

- **Preventing frozen conflict.** A political settlement does not guarantee forward momentum. Even if Syria does not return to violence, it risks remaining in a protracted state of low-level, non-violent conflict (such as Cyprus). The long-term reconciliation process should develop tools such as civic education, public commemoration, shared cultural symbols, or ongoing, regular national and local-level dialogue to help keep the process moving forward.

CHALLENGES AND SCENARIOS FOR RECONCILIATION IN SYRIA

While the experiences of other countries can provide some lessons for Syria, as described above, achieving reconciliation in the Syrian context, where the civil war followed a period of sustained and harsh autocratic rule, is incredibly complex and difficult. If and when a Syrian post-conflict transition process gets up and running operationally, it will need to integrate reconciliation into all elements of the transition. For example, when rebuilding and redesigning Syria's new school system, donors and implementers should consider how to ensure reconciliation mechanisms are incorporated into the curriculum (as described below) and how to ensure that the division of school districts does not reinforce grievances and ethnic and religious divides. One great challenge in the Syrian case is the lack of central government control. As a consequence of the civil war, Syria has become a network of fiefdoms lacking a unitary state. Thus, coordinating a national reconciliation process will require engaging a variety of disparate actors with differing motivations and who do not answer to a central authority. On the positive side, this provides an opportunity to reconstitute the Syrian national state in a more effective and efficient form as well as to engage in a process of decentralization from both the top-down and bottom-up. And because of the lack of an effective state structure, reconciliation in Syria need not occur simultaneously across the country in a unitary fashion. Rather, the international community and local implementers should consider subnational reconciliation options in areas where reconciliation is possible (particularly beginning with intracommunal dialogue) even if other areas are not yet ripe for reconciliation.

A second challenge is the massive refugee population who are both larger in numbers and more advanced in development than other similar post-conflict situations such as those in sub-Saharan Africa. Here, it is essential to begin the reconciliation process in host countries and refugee camps as soon as possible. The primary goal is to ensure that refugees are well integrated both in their host communities and have the necessary tools to integrate into Syria should they return home. As mentioned in the case of Iraq, reconciliation of refugee communities (as well as of Syrians still in-country) is key to preventing further ISIS recruitment of disenfranchised and hopeless Syrians.

A third challenge is the erosion of governance and the social contract that occurred in Syria prior to 2011, long before the uprising against Bashar Assad, disproportionately affecting Syria's youth and paving the way for Islamic radicalism. Like other Arab autocratic republics, Syria's Baathist regime was a clientelistic system, wherein the regime's power was sustained through Arab nationalist and socialist ideology, deploying state resources to coopt societal forces, and, where necessary, the brutal deployment of state violence against dissenters. Syria's regime exercised these tools of autocratic control in a context where the majority of the population was already perceived with

grave suspicion, making the regime even more willing to use force in the name of regime survival. In 1982, for example, Hafez Assad notoriously sent forces into the city of Hama and massacred perhaps as many as 10,000-40,000 people in an effort to squash the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood,²⁷ which had become a focal point of dissent against the regime. In late 2011 and 2012, when the Syrian uprising began to become violent, the first wave of fighters emerged from this long-suppressed Muslim Brotherhood current and they paved the way for the Islamization of the revolution.

But the economic and ideological components of the regime's survival strategy began to erode long before the uprising began. There were multiple triggers for this authoritarian breakdown: a rising youth demographic that demanded jobs and state services the inefficient autocracy could not provide; advances in information technology that challenged the state's monopoly on information and news; the ouster of fellow Baathist Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the destabilizing impact of that country's civil war on Syria; a drought in Syria's east that badly stressed domestic food production and put additional strain on Sunni Arab and Kurdish communities already alienated from the government, and sent more young people flooding into Syria's cities looking for work; and the pressures of economic globalization on Syria's stunted and state-driven economy. By 2011, activists reported, education, healthcare, and other key government services were creaking, broken, or absent from the rural areas of the country, and even Syria's famed university system was falling behind the rest of the region. These were the background conditions for the uprising that began in 2011—and they are also the background conditions for any consideration of stabilization and reconstruction efforts. Syria's national government was not functioning well enough to provide security or livelihood to Syrian citizens before the war began; the government that existed was brutal, partisan, and increasingly ineffective. Reconstructing that government will not offer the Syrian population even a modicum of what it seeks from post-conflict governance.

Finally, the reconciliation process will take a vastly different shape depending on whether Assad is victorious or the civil war ends via a more equitable political arrangement.

SCENARIO 1: ASSAD REMAINS IN POWER

Should Assad and his supporters be victorious, reconciliation will be extremely difficult with a high chance of a return to conflict. Syria under Assad was a minority-run autocratic regime that always operated with suspicion toward, and was met with suspicion from, the larger ethnic and sectarian groups in Syria. Ever since the 1970 coup that installed Hafez Assad (Bashar's father), Syrian Sunni Arabs and Sunni Kurds have understood the government as working to keep them subservient to the Assad family and the minority Alawi sect they represent. This sense of marginalization was only reinforced by the 30-year Syrian-Iranian alliance, which put Syria under the influence of the region's largest Shiite country, one ruled by a revolutionary Islamist and actively proselytic clerical elite. For many Syrian Sunnis, the years since the 2003 invasion of Iraq further underscored the salience to them of their Sunni identity, as the civil war in Iraq pushed many Iraqi Sunnis into Syria and led Syrian Sunnis to support Iraqi Sunni militias fighting in Iraq. This cross-border sectarian identification is eased by the fact that Syrian and Iraqi Sunnis share many family and tribal ties across their shared border.

27 Deborah Amos, "30 Years Later, Photos Emerge from Killings in Syria," *NPR*, February 2, 2012, <http://www.npr.org/2012/02/01/146235292/30-years-later-photos-emerge-from-killings-in-syria>.

The uprising itself, and the regime's brutal response, further set the conditions for post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction. When Syrians rose up in peaceful protest against their government, Bashar Assad and his cronies responded with brute force. Peaceful protesters and their activist leaders and mentors were arrested by the regime in large numbers, disappeared and tortured. Simultaneously, the state's use of violence against its citizens swiftly created a strong market for others with guns to defend citizens from the government's predations—swiftly transforming the civil resistance into a civil war. Finally, the Syrian uprising came in the context of other regional upheaval: it began the same week that Saudi forces entered Bahrain to help the Sunni monarchy there put down large-scale protests led by the Shiite opposition. The Saudis and Bahrainis insisted that Iran was instigating the uprising in Bahrain, and Gulf Arab clerics and the media launched forceful anti-Shiite campaigns. When the Syrian uprising began, then, it was both natural and self-serving for the Gulf to immediately paint that struggle, too, in terms of Arabs versus Iran and Sunnis versus Shiites. The sectarian dimension of the conflict, however much it may have begun as a politically-driven narrative, has now become a violent reality for Syrians and a severe obstacle to post-conflict reconciliation, particularly in the case of an Assad victory.

Thus, this scenario would likely result in a highly angry and demoralized Sunni population, some of whom may seek revenge against the state. Additionally, as the chasm between pro- and anti-Assad Syrians grows, this scenario may lead some non-Sunnis who fit into the anti-Assad camp to continue fighting against the regime. Furthermore, as other conflicts have shown, in order to agree to take part in reconciliation and take responsibility for the crimes committed during a conflict, a party must feel sufficiently disempowered—i.e. they have no better options left. Thus, should Assad and his forces be victorious, he will not likely be motivated enough to engage in any serious reconciliation process that would hold him and his supporters accountable for acts carried out either prior to or during the civil war. And, as the paper on attitudes of the regional actors notes, Assad's foreign friends, particularly Iran and Russia, may act to further exacerbate Syria's deep sectarian divides by giving Assad cover for his potential failure to allow for a serious and fair reconciliation process.

In this scenario, the best possible reconciliation agreement would provide some sort of judicial amnesty to combatants on all sides who renounce violence and agree to some sort of reparations for victims—either financial or symbolic. Here it is key to avoid the Algerian scenario—a return to strict authoritarianism, coupled with a top-down, symbolic reconciliation effort that provides no justice for victims. Although not ideal, the process could anonymize perpetrators, as was the case in Morocco. Additionally, the international community should work with the reconstituted Assad government to ensure that he does not replicate the asymmetric, minority-led government of the past. Rather, experts should help Syrian officials devise some form of consociational arrangement or quota system to ensure fair representation of Sunni Arabs and Sunni Kurds within the Assad-led government. A decentralization process will be key here and donors should focus heavily on locally-based reconciliation processes that allow victims within individual communities to achieve at least a modicum of justice.

Lustration will also take on greater importance under this scenario, as the “losers” in the civil war should not be expected to follow orders from or otherwise be ruled by perpetrators of atrocities from the prior regime or the civil war. The key to successful reconciliation under Scenario 1 is to make clear to Assad and his inner circle that without undertaking minimal reconciliation efforts including national and local dialogues and

some form of airing of grievances or accounting for the past, Syria will quickly return to bloody civil war.

SCENARIO 2: ATTEMPTING RECONCILIATION IN A SAFE ZONE

The second scenario assumes that the United States (possibly with the acquiescence of Russia and with the support of Gulf partners) is able to establish one or more safe zones within which the United Nations and the international donor community could undertake preliminary attempts at reconciliation. Under this scenario it will be crucial to begin to establish conditions for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have left these areas to return home. Under the type of safe zones that the Trump administration has proposed, where thousands of Syrian refugees return to their homeland, it will be crucial for the international community to support small reconciliation programs within refugee camps and communities prior to their return to Syria. Successfully reintegrating refugees back into Syria will require a thoughtful process that allows victims even the most superficial opportunity to document their abuses and air their grievances before returning to “normal” life.

Reconciliation in a safe zone will involve wholly localized processes targeted to the needs of the people and the circumstances on the ground. As Faysal Itani and Tobias Schneider argue, local efforts can be extended to a larger area down the road: “Development strategies aimed at meeting local needs by empowering local actors are compelling because they are scalable and replicable across Syria, if and when conditions allow.”²⁸ This scenario both provides better opportunities for the international community to undertake reconciliation, but at the local or community level, as well as serious questions for donors. Specifically, it is unclear whether Western governments and multilateral development banks would be willing to support medium-term development efforts in a limited territory with uncertain sovereign status.

SCENARIO 3: ASSAD STEPS DOWN RESULTING IN A MORE EQUITABLE POLITICAL ARRANGEMENT

The third scenario presumes some sort of negotiated political settlement signed by all parties to the conflict (with the likely exception of ISIS and its supporters), along the lines of the broad-based unity government as discussed during the April 2016 Intra-Syrian Talks in Geneva. This scenario is clearly more amenable to comprehensive reconciliation but also highly unlikely. While we do not anticipate that this scenario will come to fruition, it is nevertheless useful to articulate some ideas for how reconciliation would take place. With no clear winners or losers, all parties have a stake in both moving the country forward and in accounting for the past in a fair and equitable way. The challenges mentioned above will still be present, with each group reluctant to take responsibility for the crimes committed during and prior to the civil war as well as external spoilers potentially meddling in the process. Thus, to set the reconciliation process up for success, basic terms of reconciliation, including a timeline for the establishment of a transitional justice mechanism, should be included in any signed political settlement. A danger in this scenario is overcompensating for the Assad regime’s abuse of Sunnis by accidentally or intentionally excluding Shiites, and thereby exacerbating sectarian tensions.

28 Faysal Itani and Tobias Schneider, “It’s Time to Plan for Rebuilding Syria,” *Atlantic Council*, March 1, 2017, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/its-time-to-plan-for-rebuilding-syria>.

Another consideration, particularly in this scenario, is how to sequence the reconciliation process. Often reconciliation processes, particularly transitional justice, are rushed in order to move society forward quickly. However, in the Syrian context and facing the deep challenges described above, including a harsh authoritarian legacy and brutal violence, there is no easy model of reconciliation to put in place.

In Tunisia, as explained above, much of the reconciliation process was delayed in order to prioritize the political transition. While the Tunisian case is different from the Syrian case in some important ways, most notably the lack of a violent conflict in Tunisia, this sequencing may be preferable in Syria as well. The wounds of the Syrian conflict are deep and wide. Immediately launching into a public grievance process could harm Syria's prospects of reconciliation rather than move the country forward. Ideally, Syria should begin within intracommunal dialogue (both in Syria and in refugee host countries) as well as joint reconstruction projects, which bring together Syrians from different religious and ethnic communities to undertake physical projects such as rebuilding hospitals or cleaning the streets, to accomplish the dual act of contact between groups and aiding in the reconstruction of the country.

Syria would benefit from a more deliberative reconciliation process that provides space for the voices of local and national political leaders, civil society, and individual citizens from across the country. This process can be lengthy, but the benefits of giving all Syrians a chance to contribute to designing the reconciliation process are worth the delay.

INCORPORATING RECONCILIATION INTO EARLY MISSION PLANNING

Some of these scenarios will involve some role for an international stabilization presence, perhaps through the U.N. It is crucial that any such mission consider how to support reconciliation processes from the outset. In particular, peacekeepers will be instrumental in several of the short-term objectives for reconciliation: establishing basic security and rule of law; demobilization and disarmament of non-state militias; preserving evidence of crimes; and improving the quality and quantity of contact between Syrians of different ethnic, religious, and political backgrounds.

As we discuss in the other papers in this series, the most likely scenario would involve stabilization by a U.S.-led force, followed by a U.N. force or political mission to undertake the medium-term and/or long-term peacekeeping. Here, the U.N. could take on a variety of roles that assist in the reconciliation process.

This could include both establishing and coordinating with formalized oversight bodies to provide safety and security for victims and establish municipal councils and court systems to process claims. International forces will be crucial to the demobilization and disarmament phase as well, and should consider at the outset how to best prevent reprisal violence, which is particularly likely under the first scenario. This can be accomplished, in part, by conducting an assessment of local government and military leaders. It will be important to ensure civilian leadership in each local jurisdiction in order to enable effective representation and accountability and to avoid setting up non-state actors as substitutes for government as defined and authorized under the end-of-conflict agreements. International actors can survey existing local councils and other local governance bodies to determine their appropriateness and capacity to act as interim governors in achieving basic security. International actors should also complete a survey of existing armed actors, their zones of control, and their "home base" locations

to ensure that as many as possible have links to those participating in negotiating the end of conflict and transitional government agreements, and will be bound by those agreements. Early mission planning should also prioritize the preservation of documentation of crimes to be incorporated into future truth commissions.

ADDITIONAL PROGRAMMATIC IDEAS FOR SYRIA

Below are some possible reconciliation programs that could take place in Syria. Some, as noted, could begin prior to a political settlement, while others would be put in place in the longer term.

- **Conduct an assessment of Syrian civil society.** Donors should carry out a comprehensive assessment of the state of Syrian civil society, determining which organizations are operating, in which sectors, and with what resources. This should be conducted prior to the end of conflict and a regularly updated database should be created in order to identify potential local partners in key sectors.
- **Create a sustainable funding mechanism.** Reconciliation will be a decades-long process that will require a sustained source of funding to carry out programming. Donors should support a dedicated 10-year pipeline of funding that specifically targets reconciliation programming, such as the USAID Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM) grant program. Total funding could vary slightly from year to year, but an overall commitment to this type of programming will give civil society groups engaged in reconciliation programming the ability to strategically plan their efforts without fear that the funding will disappear after a few years.
- **Transitional justice legislation conferences.** Following the model of Tunisia, Syrian civil society groups should hold a series of convenings both inside Syria and in refugee communities to begin drafting transitional justice legislation and enforcement mechanisms. Given the chaos that is likely to be in place even in the early months post-conflict, civil society should begin now to think through the most effective types of legislation for the Syrian context and conduct outreach regarding legislation to as wide a swath of the country as possible to build trust and the credibility of the process once implemented into law.
- **Undertake facilitated dialogues.** As shown in Iraq, dialogue is an essential part of reconciliation and can take many forms. One important starting point is community leader dialogue. This can be religious leaders, civil society leaders, local political leaders, or other community representatives. The goal is to first get community influencers on board with the reconciliation processes and goals in order to have them transmit their views to their constituencies. Conversely, without community leader buy-in, any dialogue program at the grassroots level is likely to fail. A second dialogue stage, therefore, is for community leaders to lead dialogues within their own distinct communities. While there is some danger in reinforcing prejudices or negative narratives during segregated dialogues, it is important for community leaders to be able to speak freely with their own constituencies in order to build their trust before embarking on large, cross-sectoral dialogue. These dialogues can begin prior to a political settlement.
- **Develop new school curriculum.** It is essential to begin to educate Syria's warring communities about one another from an early age. Devising new curricula for elementary through university level education that both acknowledge Syria's

different communities and address the civil war using age-appropriate language should be a priority. Members of Syria's ethnic and religious groups should be consulted regarding their specific sections of the curriculum, but it should be overseen by a neutral (likely international) curriculum development expert.

- **Addressing the lost generation.** Often coexistence programming begins with individuals at the high school or post-secondary age. However, in Syria there is a tremendous risk of further alienating the so-called “lost-generation”—children born during the Syrian civil war. International NGOs can devise programs that specifically target Syrians as young as elementary school. An example of a successful planned encounter program targeting young children in the Israeli-Palestinian context is Kids4Peace. This program involves both local (Jerusalem-based) engagements and travel to the United States to engage with diaspora communities. It could be easily replicated in the Syrian case.
- **Joint reconstruction projects.** Bringing members of different religious and ethnic groups together to physically rebuild their communities accomplishes multiple tasks—the necessary act of repairing damaged and destroyed infrastructure, and providing a practical avenue for interaction. This would likely take place following the cessation of hostilities.
- **Trauma training.** The Syrian psychiatric and medical communities are already overwhelmed by demand for their services. The international community should both begin to plan for physical trauma centers to help aid the psychological processing after the end of the conflict and train Syrian and foreign nurses, psychiatrists, and advocates who are skilled in handling post-conflict trauma.
- **Creating a joint national narrative and symbols.** International donors or NGOs could sponsor a contest to create new a national flag, anthem, memorials, or other joint symbols that emphasize the shared heritage of all Syrians and provide patriotic imagery around which to rally.

CONCLUSION

We should be under no illusions that the reconciliation process in Syria will be easy. The destruction and devastation to human life, property, and infrastructure will take decades to repair. Every step of the way there will likely be spoilers intent on undermining the reconciliation process, including self-interested political leaders, foreign governments, and ISIS and other extremist groups.

The challenges facing Syria are immense, including the lack of central government control, the violent authoritarian legacy that marginalized and brutalized the majority sect, erosion of the social contract and ineffective governance that particularly affected young Syrians through poor education and joblessness, the massive refugee and IDP population, and the legacy of intense sectarian conflict fueled by external powers as well as internal dynamics. Any reconciliation process must be carefully designed and context-specific to avoid creating, rather than healing divides.

However, should Syria reach an eventual end to conflict, there are several lessons from other reconciliation experiences we can apply to Syria:

STABILIZATION PLANNING IN SYRIA

- Political will for reconciliation is insufficient to carry out a successful and sustained process without public buy-in (and vice versa).
- A process that allows victims and their families to air their grievances but does not name perpetrators or provides them amnesty is one way to walk the line between justice and revenge.
- Regardless of whether Assad remains in power, the international community should insist that he bless the reconciliation process, however superficially, to provide his supporters the political cover to participate in the process.
- When designing a reconciliation program, considerations should be made for abuses committed against individuals as well as groups and regions.
- International experts and civil society groups, with local partners on the ground, can play a crucial role in the early days post-conflict or while a transitional government is in place and can be drivers of the reconciliation process in the absence of effective government.
- In an asymmetric conflict, there is a need to take extra care to produce equality between groups during the reconciliation processes.
- It is important to prioritize transparency and documentation throughout the process.

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