

Scenarios for Syria: War and Stabilization

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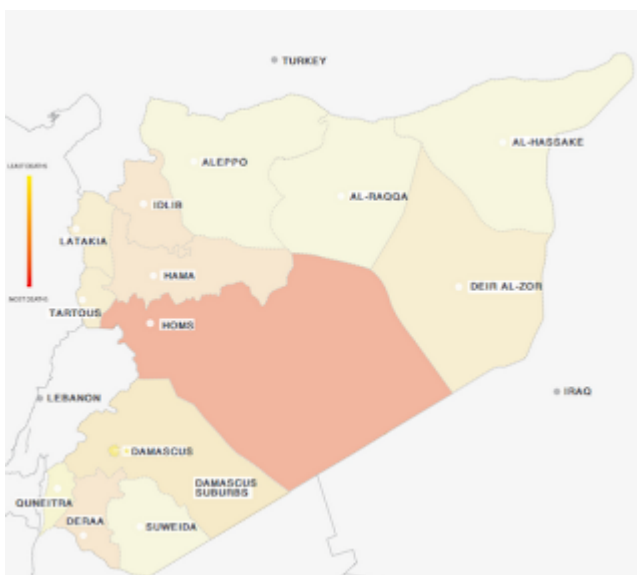
Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

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In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

Diplomatic attempts to solve the Syrian crisis have been rejected by both members of the Syrian government and the opposition. As Ankara laments bold rhetoric and militarizes its border with Syria, this article attempts to foresee three possible outcomes to the ongoing crisis.

From the start of the crisis in Syria, the possibility of open foreign military intervention has loomed uncomfortably over the series of diplomatic measures taken in an attempt to diffuse the situation. While earlier attempts to implement the Peace Plan have failed to materialize, Kofi Annan has proposed a new Syrian solution, mandating the creation of a transitional national unity government consisting of both representatives of Assad's administration and members of the opposition, insinuating that Assad would not have a place in the new government [1]. Although Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov would categorically oppose the idea of foreign powers dictating the future of Syria, stating, "We will not support and cannot support any meddling from outside or any imposition of recipes. This also concerns the fate of the president of the country, Bashar al-Assad," a recent meeting of the "Syrian Action Group" (excluding Riyadh, Tehran and Damascus) in Geneva saw world powers agree to a basic roadmap for a Syrian-led power transition.



On June 28, 2012, two large bomb explosions targeting a government building rocked Damascus, prompting President Assad to reassert the Syrian government's duty to "annihilate terrorists in any corner of the country," adding, "We will not accept any non-Syrian, non-national model, whether it comes from big countries or friendly countries. No one knows how to solve Syria's problems as well as we do" [2]. In response to the meeting, both Syrian state media and opposition groups condemned the UN-brokered peace plan for

the formation of a unity government, amid ceaseless violence across the country. Burhan Ghalioun, a senior member and former head of the opposition Syrian National Council, offered, “this is the worst international statement yet to emerge from talks on Syria”. Ghalioun would call the UN-backed transitional plan a “mockery,” insinuating that Syrians should not have to negotiate with “their executioner, who has not stopped killing, torturing... and raping women for 16 months” [3].

From the imposition of the ceasefire, the Syrian government would claim that rebel fighters regularly ignored the Kofi Annan Peace Plan by committing various ceasefire violations, employing the use of bombing, kidnapping, murder, and arson as corroborated by Reuters in their article, [“Outgunned Syria rebels make shift to bombs,”](#) confirming that rebels had adopted tactics of suicide bombing, car bombing and the use of roadside explosions [4]. While outside elements provided arms and assistance to the militant Syrian opposition in full violation of the proposed ceasefire, the mainstream media would disproportionately lay the blame on the Syrian government for failing to meet its obligations as it attempted to restore order. On June 21, 2012, The New York Times would confirm what alternative media outlets and numerous geopolitical analysts had been reporting since the first months of the uprising in 2011, that outside forces, including the American CIA, were supplying Syria’s rebels with weapons and material assistance from Southern Turkey. In their article, [“C.I.A. Said to Aid in Steering Arms to Syrian Opposition,”](#) the New York Times would state:

“A small number of C.I.A. officers are operating secretly in southern Turkey, helping allies decide which Syrian opposition fighters across the border will receive arms to fight the Syrian government, according to American officials and Arab intelligence officers. The weapons, including automatic rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, ammunition and some antitank weapons, are being funneled mostly across the Turkish border by way of a shadowy network of intermediaries including Syria’s Muslim Brotherhood and paid for by Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the officials said. The C.I.A. officers have been in southern Turkey for several weeks, in part to help keep weapons out of the hands of fighters allied with Al Qaeda or other terrorist groups, one senior American official said. The Obama administration has said it is not providing arms to the rebels, but it has also acknowledged that Syria’s neighbors would do so.

By helping to vet rebel groups, American intelligence operatives in Turkey hope to learn more about a growing, changing opposition network inside of Syria and to establish new ties. ‘C.I.A. officers are there and they are trying to make new sources and recruit people,’ said one Arab intelligence official who is briefed regularly by American counterparts. American officials and retired C.I.A. officials said the administration was also weighing additional assistance to rebels, like providing satellite imagery and other detailed intelligence on Syrian troop locations and movements. The administration is also considering whether to help the opposition set up a rudimentary intelligence service. But no decisions have been made on those measures or even more aggressive steps, like sending C.I.A. officers into Syria itself, they said” [5].

Undeniably, this confirms that the West, led by the US and its Gulf State proxies, has been undermining the Kofi Annan Peace Plan by arming insurgent fighters, particularly those of the Muslim Brotherhood, while concurrently berating the Syrian government for “violating” a UN mandated cease-fire and for “failing to protect” its population. The implications of these mainstream admissions of state sponsored terrorism and illicit arms smuggling cast shadows of doubt over any serious implementation of the Kofi Annan Peace Plan coming to

fruition. The Brookings Institution, a US think-tank noted for its influence on American foreign policy, would release a publication in March 2012 titled, "[Saving Syria: Assessing Options for Regime Change](#)," which called for using the UN-brokered ceasefire and the Kofi Annan Peace Plan to rearm the militant opposition to secure the toppling of the Syrian government in a bid to further Washington's geopolitical objectives in the region [6]. Additionally, TIME Magazine's June 25, 2012 article "[A War on Two Fronts](#)," would describe how the US State Department budgeted over \$72 million to train armed Syrian dissidents in encryption, hacking, and video production:

"Washington has said it will not actively support the Syrian opposition in its bid to oust Assad. Officially, the U.S. says it abides by the U.N process led by Kofi Annan and does not condone arms sales to opposition groups as long as there are U.N. Observers in Syria. Nevertheless, as U.S. officials have revealed to TIME, the Obama Administration has been providing media-technology training and support to Syrian dissidents by way of small nonprofits like the Institute for War & Peace Reporting and Freedom House. Viral videos of alleged atrocities, like the footage Abu Ghassan produced, have made Assad one of the most reviled men on the planet, helping turn the Arab League against him and embarrassing his few remaining allies almost daily. 'If the [U.S.] government is involved in Syria, the government isn't going to take direct responsibility for it,' says Lawrence Lessig, director of Harvard's Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics. 'The tools that you deploy in Internet freedom interfere with tools deployed by an existing government, and that can be perceived as an act of aggression.'

The program actually began four years ago with a different target: China. In 2008, Michael Horowitz, a longtime religious-liberty advocate, went to his friend Representative Frank Wolf, a Virginia Republican, and suggested setting aside funds to help Falun Gong, a religious group that Beijing has labeled a dangerous cult. The money was supposed to help the dissident distribute software to jump China's massive firewall and organize online as well as communicate freely with the outside world. Wolf succeeded in appropriating \$15 million. But U.S. diplomats feared that move would derail relations with Beijing, and little money was spent. Then in 2009 - 10 Iranian protests and last year's Arab Spring made Internet freedom a much more fashionable term in Washington. Congress soon forked over an additional \$57 million to State to spend in the next three years. The money is spilt among three areas: education and training; anonymization, which masks users' identities, usually through encryption; and circumvention technology, which allows users to overcome government censors so that their work - and that of repressive regimes - can be seen worldwide.

An ongoing challenge is that the flow of software goes to both sides. The regime has imported technology from the U.S. to track people online. 'A lot of these technologies can be used for great good,' says Sascha Meinrath, who is leading the Internet-in-a-suitcase project, 'but they are also a Faustian bargain.' The Obama Administration last month issued an Executive Order imposing sanctions on any company helping Syrian or Iran commit human-rights abuses. Washington's high-tech campaign will not dethrone Assad. But it has given Syrian dissidents a measure of confidence as they face the regime's advantage in firepower. In the months since finishing his training, Abu Ghassan has shot dozens of videos. Asked whether his AK-47 or his video camera is the more powerful weapon, Abu Ghassan laughs. 'My AK!' he says. He pauses for a few seconds. 'Actually if there is an Internet connection, my camera is more powerful'" [7].

TIME's report reflects the seemingly limitless degree of outside interference in the Syrian

conflict, with foreign entities attempting to meticulously cultivate and shape every dimension of the situation to the detriment of the legitimate government in Syria. TIME's report also mentions the Obama administration's executive order imposing sanctions on any company "helping Syria or Iran commit human-rights abuses." Unsurprisingly, this would not include the American companies that sold the Syrian government the internet technology it uses to filter its internet services - the very services the US government has allotted substantial public funds towards to train dissidents to bypass. The downing of a Turkish F-4 jet in late June further enflamed the situation, prompting Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan to vow "proportionate" retaliation for its downed jet, pledging "all possible support to liberate the Syrians from dictatorship" of Bashar al-Assad's government by offering support for Syrian rebels, while warning that any Syrian troops approaching Turkish borders would be considered a threat and dealt with as a military target [8].

On June 27th, 2012, Turkey sent a heavily guarded convoy of 15 long-distance guns and other military vehicles to the Syrian border, amid belligerent threats of retaliation [9]. While the situation on the Turkish-Syrian border remains tense as Turkish officials deploy 30 anti-aircraft batteries, the Turkish Defense Procurement Agency has recently announced its plans to seek a \$4 billion contract for a long-range air-defense missile system [10]. Documents released by The Brookings Institution and The Council on Foreign Relations indicate that Turkey is the nation elected to lead the charge against Assad if the situation continues to deteriorate, ostensibly to annex regions of northern Syria to establish a series of long proposed "humanitarian corridors," from which Syria's militant opposition fighters would base their operations [11]. In reflection of the current situation, several scenarios can be proposed in an attempt to foresee how the crisis can be either diffused, or further enflamed:

- **Assad ignores UN calls for an interim government and attempts to quell the insurgency by force**, reflecting the conduct of nations such as Algeria, who have successfully suppressed insurgents affiliated with AQIM. This course of action may work to further enflame the situation if outside forces increase their use of foreign mercenaries and continue to provide rebel fighters with more dangerous armaments, including chemical or biological weapons. If Syrian security forces were unable to immediately restore order and crush the insurgency, any authentic or manufactured atrocity or incursion into Turkish territory may be enough to tip the scale in favor of open military intervention (with or without the approval of the UNSC). If that occurred, the Turkish-Syrian border would see open exchanges of fire, with Ankara attempting to capture territory in northern Syria. Russia, Iran, and China would condemn Turkey and other allied NATO member states, with the potential of those nations opposed to regime change in Damascus offering military support to Assad. From that point, the potential for a wider regional conflict is plausible.

- **Assad ignores UN calls for an interim government and succeeds in quelling the insurgency by force**, causing rebel militants to disperse, surrender and take refuge in rural areas and neighboring countries. Syrian security forces would increase their operations and attempt to maintain order in population centers. The military would secure tense areas and some form of normality would resume, although bombings and other attacks could persist on a smaller scale. Assad would step up internal security, and be portrayed as an international pariah in the international media. Syria would continue suffering under heavy economic sanctions. If Assad continues to hold onto power, failing to deliver reforms and political pluralism, internal dissent could again become problematic, potentially shifting moderates to embrace factions of the opposition. Political turmoil would ensue, but the

security situation could be stabilized if insurgent activity is successfully subdued.

• **Assad accepts the interim government solution and submits his resignation,** potentially encouraging insurgents to take advantage of the sensitive transitional period by increasing their operations against security forces, continuing the months of belligerent violence and killing. If insurgents pushed forward with their campaign and were able to maintain an upper hand amid political transition, rebels would attempt to capture territory in and around population centers. Armed gangs would persecute Assad loyalists, Alawites, Shi'a, and other religious minorities such as Christians and Druze if they successfully captured territory, reflecting the conduct of Libyan LIFG fighters toward ethnic minorities and loyalists. The interim government would struggle to maintain the security situation and likely be unable to implement coherent policy amid divisions in leadership. Political turmoil would ensue, and armed gangs could continue their campaign, amid increasing sectarian tensions.

Civilian casualties could inevitably result from all these potential scenarios, as an unintended consequence of infighting between Syrian security forces and militants in populated areas, or as an intentional act of sectarian belligerence as demonstrated by extremists in Houla and elsewhere. The ongoing perpetuation of violence in Syria is not attributable to the dominant media narrative of Assad "butchering his own people," but to the calculated and meticulous formation of a violent Salafist-front, directed by foreign powers to overwhelm and topple the government of Syria. Journalist Seymour Hersh's 2007 exposé published in the New Yorker titled, "[The Redirection](#)," exposed a joint US-Israeli-Saudi operation to create a violent extremist Sunni-front to direct at the Shi'a leadership of Hezbollah in Lebanon, President Bashar al-Assad in Syria, and the Iranian government, using extremist forces with direct ties to Al Qaeda in proxy. The New Yorker would report the testimony of a former senior intelligence official and US government consultant:

"We are in a program to enhance the Sunni capability to resist Shiite influence, and we're spreading the money around as much as we can," the former senior intelligence official said. The problem was that such money "always gets in more pockets than you think it will," he said. "In this process, we're financing a lot of bad guys with some serious potential unintended consequences. We don't have the ability to determine and get pay vouchers signed by the people we like and avoid the people we don't like. It's a very high-risk venture" [12].

While Kofi Annan's original Peace Plan – if honestly implemented with both sides respecting the cease-fire – would have defused the situation, it is Annan and the member nations of NATO and the Gulf Cooperation Council that disproportionately laid the blame for increasing violence solely on the Syrian government, while those nations took every measure possible to further enflame the situation by providing material assistance to sectarian extremists. Considering the level of subversion and deceit demonstrated by foreign powers operating in Syria, Bashar al-Assad's ambitions to crush sectarian fighters by force may well be warranted. As with many other Western-backed uprisings operating under the cover of "democratic" jargon, the use of violence, snipers, mercenaries, and other armed provocateurs is part of a long established pattern of national destabilization through the barrel of a gun. Undoubtedly, there will come a time when those responsible individuals answer for their crimes against the nation of Syria, and it's people.

Notes

- [1] [Kofi Annan proposes Syria 'unity government,'](#) Al Jazeera, June 28, 2012
- [2] [Annan 'optimistic' about Syria talks,](#) Tehran Times, June 29, 2012
- [3] [Syria transition plan denounced by both sides,](#) Al Jazeera, July 1, 2012
- [4] [Outgunned Syria rebels make shift to bombs,](#) Reuters, April 30, 2012
- [5] [C.I.A. Said to Aid in Steering Arms to Syrian Opposition,](#) The New York Times, June 21, 2012
- [6] [Saving Syria: Assessing Options for Regime Change,](#) The Brookings Institution, March 2012
- [7] [Hillary's Little Startup: How the U.S. Is Using Technology to Aid Syria's Rebels,](#) TIME Magazine, June 13, 2012
- [8] [Turkish PM vows to help 'liberate Syria from dictatorship,'](#) Russia Today, June 26, 2012
- [9] [Ankara deploys military convoy to Syrian border: Turkish media,](#) PressTV, June 28, 2012
- [10] [Missile shopping: Turkey to buy long-range missile system,](#) Russia Today, June 29, 2012
- [11] [U.S.-Turkey Relations: A New Partnership,](#) The Council on Foreign Relations, May 9, 2012
- [12] [The Redirection,](#) The New Yorker, March 5, 2007

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