

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES OF THE SYRIAN CONFLICT: A CASE STUDY FOR
UNDERSTANDING CIVIL WAR TERMINATION

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

By

KAITLIN PEACH
Norman, Oklahoma
2017

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES OF THE SYRIAN CONFLICT: A CASE STUDY FOR
UNDERSTANDING CIVIL WAR TERMINATION

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
COLLEGE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

BY

Dr. Joshua Landis, Chair

Dr. Mark Raymond

Dr. John Fishel

To my parents.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank my thesis committee, Dr. Joshua Landis, Dr. Mark Raymond, and Dr. John Fishel for helping me through the thesis writing process. I am so thankful for their encouragement and feedback. I want to thank Dr. Landis and The Carter Center's Syria Conflict Mapping Project staff, Chris McNaboe and Kate Keator, for sparking my interest in Syria and the conflict and encouraging me to research the conflict.

I would also like to thank my parents, Dr. Jim Peach and Dr. Kathy Brook for their constant support and encouragement throughout college and my life. I also want to thank my roommates, Rachel Brookins and Raleigh Simms for being so supportive throughout this process.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iv
List of Figures.....	vii
Abstract.....	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Brief History of the Syrian Conflict	1
Literature Review on Weak States and Civil Wars	7
Chapter 2: Domestic Actors	16
The Asad Government.....	16
Hafez al-Asad and the Ba’ath Party	16
Bashar al-Asad and Pro-Government Actors	19
Who Supports the Asad Government?	20
Goals of the Asad Government	21
The Opposition	22
The Syrian National Coalition.....	22
The Failure of the Moderate Opposition	24
Extremist Groups: The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and Jabhat al-Nusra	24
The Kurds and the Syrian Democratic Forces.....	27
Conclusions	29
Chapter 3: International Involvement.....	31
Russia	31
Iran and Hezbollah	33
Turkey	35

The United States	36
Saudi Arabia	39
The Peace Process	39
The Arab League's Peace Plan	40
The Annan Plan	42
The Geneva Peace Process	44
The 2017 Astana Talks	45
Geneva IV	47
Future Peace Talks	49
Conclusion	50
Chapter 4: Analysis and Conclusions	51
Two Paths to Ending the Conflict	52
Negotiated Settlement	52
Decisive Military Victory	53
Will the conflict end soon?	56
Conclusions: What can we expect from a post-conflict Syria?	56
Bibliography	58

List of Figures

Figure 1. Areas of Control as of 4 April 2017	2
---	---

Abstract

The Syrian conflict has been ongoing for the last six years and has left the international community unsure of how or when it will end. Existing literature on civil war termination creates a framework in which we can better understand what the potential outcomes for the conflict will be. These outcomes are negotiated settlement and decisive military victory. The civil war literature indicates that the conflict is not likely to end in negotiated settlement due to the failure of the peace process thus far and that decisive military victory by the Asad government is the most likely outcome of the conflict. Additionally, civil war literature explains that a conflict like the Syrian conflict is not likely to end quickly due to domestic and international actors acting as spoilers to the peace process. While the international community has pushed for negotiated settlement, it needs to be prepared for both potential outcomes.

This thesis argues that because a decisive military victory by the Asad government is the most likely outcome, the period following the conflict will not be peaceful. The Syrian government is likely to continue its crackdown on opposition groups and continue to commit human rights violations and the opposition is not likely to disarm peacefully. Thus, the end of a conflict does not mean the end of violence. This will make reconstruction extremely difficult and the ongoing refugee crisis is likely to continue. Therefore, the international community not only needs to be prepared for an Asad victory, but for the worsening of the current humanitarian crisis.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Brief History of the Syrian Conflict

In December 2010, mass demonstrations that would be known collectively as the Arab Spring began in Tunisia after the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouzizi and quickly spread across the Middle East. Syrians had become increasingly frustrated with the authoritarian Ba'th regime, dominated by the Asad family, and its refusal to allow for a new system of governance to emerge, whether it would be a Sharia-based government or democratic government was and still is an issue of debate amongst the opposition. The protests had different outcomes across the Arab world, but Syria's revolution would result in an extremely violent and complex conflict. The Syrian civil war began as peaceful protests in response to the arrest and torture of several young boys in Dara'a. In February 2011, the boys spray-painted "The people want the fall of the regime" and "It's your turn, doctor" on the wall of a school.¹ The boys were tortured by the *mukhabarat* and in response people in Dara'a and other parts of Syria began to protest the government. These protests did not remain peaceful for long, as there were reports that people were killed by security forces at protests in Dara'a in March 2011.²

Early on in the Arab Spring, Syrians felt that the revolution would end quickly and that civil war was not a possibility because the different religious and ethnic groups had been able to live together peacefully.³ President Bashar al-Asad was also optimistic that he would not meet the same fate as President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia

¹ Kelly McEvers. "Revisiting The Spark That Kindled The Syrian Uprising." *NPR*, 16 March 2012. 22

² "Violence erupts at protests in Syria." Violence erupts at protests in Syria - Al Jazeera English. March 18, 2011. Accessed January 4, 2017.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/03/201131817214964640.html>.

³ Stephen Starr. *Revolt in Syria: Eye-witness to the Uprising*. 2nd ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, 153-154.

due to military strength and an extremely splintered opposition.⁴ However, as clashes and violence escalated it was clear that the war would not end quickly or easily as a result of deteriorating religious community relations. What has resulted is a six year-long conflict, that has divided the country and that does not seem to have a clear outcome, other than that Asad is likely to achieve military victory and retake most of the country.

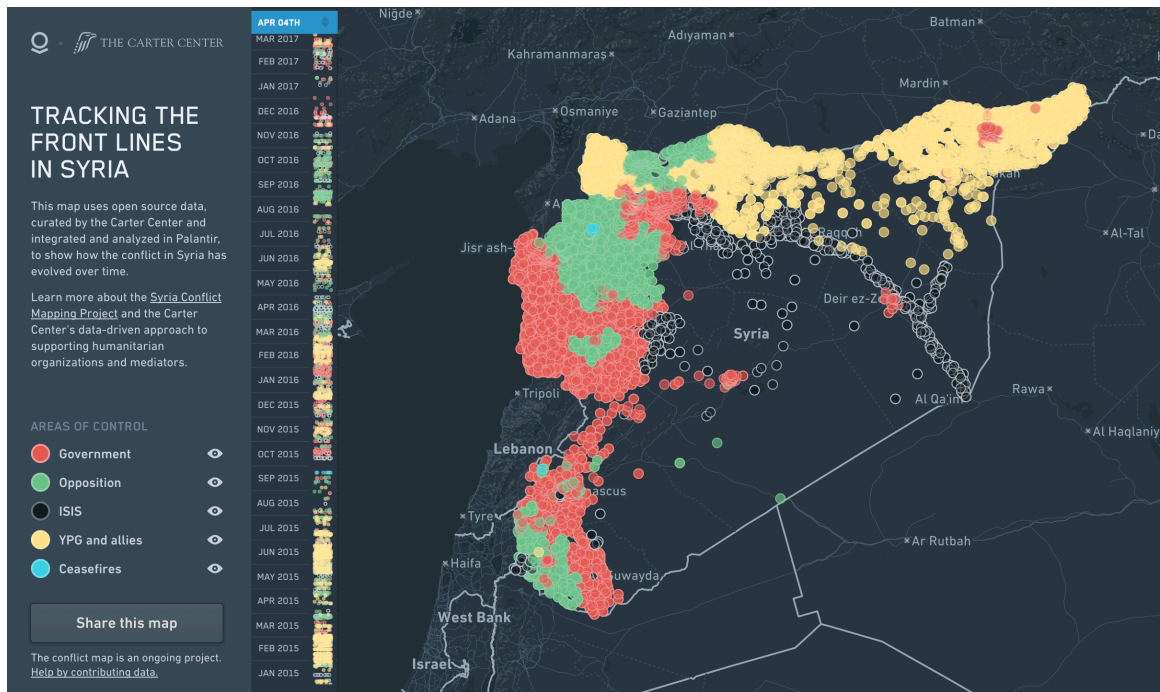


Figure 1. Areas of Control as of 4 April 2017⁵

The above map created by The Carter Center Syria Conflict Mapping Project shows the divisiveness that exists within the state, although on a somewhat simplistic level because the opposition is one group on the map. However, it does demonstrate to an extent how divided Syria is.

⁴ Joshua Landis. "The Syrian Uprising of 2011: Why the Asad Regime Is Likely to Survive to 2013." *Middle East Policy* 19.1 (Spring 2012), 1-3. 1 August 2016.

⁵ "Syria Dashboard." Syria Dashboard. 2016. Accessed 4 April, 2016. <https://d3svb6mundity5.cloudfront.net/dashboard/index.html>.

In addition to constant violence that results in civilian deaths, there have been reports that indicate that chemical weapons have been used in the conflict. Syria is not a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention. In 2013, a United Nations team “found “clear and convincing evidence” that Sarin gas was used in an incident that occurred on 21 August in the Ghouta area on the outskirts of Damascus in which hundreds of people were reportedly killed.”⁶ Many in the thought that this incident would cause the international community to intervene militarily, invoking the Responsibility to Protect doctrine, however it did not, despite the fact that President Barack Obama had declared that the Syrian government had crossed a red line by using chemical weapons; although this red line is often attributed to Obama, he states that the red line was one set by the world in the Chemical Weapons convention.⁷ The red line and the lack of response by the Obama Administration to it, have caused problems for the administration because many feel that the president failed to intervene in Syria when he had a chance. The opposition and the government have accused each other of using chemical weapons.

On 4 April 2017, there were reports that the Syrian government bombed the town of Khan Skeikoun in Idlib province with chemical weapons.⁸ This is one of the worst attacks by the Syrian government since the beginning of the Trump

⁶ “‘Clear and convincing’ evidence of chemical weapons use in Syria, UN team reports.” UN News Center. September 16, 2013. Accessed December 29, 2016.

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=45856#.WG1zJLYrLEY>.

⁷ Barack Obama and Fredrik Reinfeldt. “Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Reinfeldt of Sweden in Joint Press Conference.” The White House. September 04, 2013. Accessed December 29, 2016. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/04/remarks-president-obama-and-prime-minister-reinfeldt-sweden-joint-press->.

; Glenn Kessler. “President Obama and the ‘red line’ on Syria’s chemical weapons.” *The Washington Post*, September 6, 2013. Accessed December 29, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2013/09/06/president-obama-and-the-red-line-on-syrias-chemical-weapons/?utm_term=.f380a551e68d.

⁸ “Massive bombardment target a hospital and kills 58 including 11 children in Khan Shekhon.” Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. April 4, 2017. Accessed April 4, 2017. <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=64104>

Administration, but it appears that it will not alter the Administration's stance that the Syrian people will decide whether Asad will stay or go.⁹

The conflict has possibly created one of the worst humanitarian crises of the 21st century, with hundreds of thousands killed and millions displaced. Following the fall of Aleppo to the Syrian government, United States ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power best explained the humanitarian crisis and many actors' responses to it. In particular, Power was directing her blame at Russian President Vladimir Putin, as he could possibly influence the Asad regime to reach a peace agreement and because the Russian government has had its role in airstrikes and other operations that have resulted in the civilian deaths.

Your forces and proxies are carrying out these crimes. Your barrel bombs and mortars and air strikes have allowed the militia in Aleppo to encircle tens of thousands of civilians in your ever-tightening noose. It is your noose. Three member states of the U.N. contributing to a noose around civilians. It should shame you. Instead, by all appearances, it is emboldening you. You are plotting your next assault. Are you truly incapable of shame? Is there literally nothing that can shame you? Is there no act of barbarism against civilians, no execution of a child that gets under your skin, that just creeps you out a little bit? Is there nothing you will not lie about or justify?¹⁰

The international community failed to act early on and chose not to implement the responsibility to protect doctrine in order to prevent the atrocities occurring in Syria.

This has been one of the major questions of the war; why has no one acted to stop it?

Despite numerous peace proposals, the international community, particularly Russia and the United States, and the Syrian people seem to be unable to reach an agreement

⁹ Anne Barnard. "Gas Attack Is Said to Kill Dozens in Syria." *The New York Times*, April 4, 2017. Accessed April 4, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/04/world/middleeast/syria-gas-attack.html?_r=0.

¹⁰ Samantha Power. "Remarks at a UN Security Council Emergency Briefing on Syria" United States Mission to the United Nations. December 13, 2016. Accessed December 26, 2016. <https://usun.state.gov/remarks/7607>.

on how to stop the killing.

As Charles Glass explained, “the battle for Aleppo is a war for Syria itself,” meaning whoever wins the battle for Aleppo will likely be the victor in the conflict.¹¹ December 2016 marked a turning point for the almost six year long war—the Syrian government backed by Russian forces was able to retake the strategic city of Aleppo. In 2012, opposition forces captured neighborhoods in the eastern part of the city and it would take four years for the government to retake control of the opposition stronghold. The Syrian government was able to achieve success due to aerial bombardments from the Russian government. The battle ended when the opposition lost control of eastern Aleppo and a deal was reached to allow opposition fighters and families to leave so that many could receive much needed medical attention.

The fall of Aleppo does not mark the end of the conflict as the opposition is still reluctant to let Assad maintain power and the end of the war means a political solution, not just a military one, needs to be reached. Ceasefires have thus far been very weak and have not ended the violence. Despite gaining control over Aleppo, armed groups still control other parts of the country and ISIS continues to be a problem. Additionally, as long as the international interference continues, it will be challenging for Syrians to work together to create a solution that is best for Syrians, and not what is best for the United States or Russia. A political solution is thus far more challenging than a military one as it requires many groups to make compromises that they are unlikely to make.

Following the fall of Aleppo, a countrywide ceasefire backed by Russia and Turkey was declared on 29 December 2016. As in many of the previous ceasefire deals,

¹¹ Charles Glass. *Syria burning: A Short History of a Catastrophe*. London: Verso, 2016. 121.

this one excludes jihadist groups, such as ISIS.¹² The FSA says that this deal does not include the YPG too.¹³ Therefore, despite being a countrywide truce, “that really only covers the areas where the sides who have signed up to the truce have a presence.”¹⁴ The deal also states that peace talks will be held in Kazakhstan in a month if the ceasefire holds. The YPG would not take part in the peace talks since they are excluded from the ceasefire agreement.

Despite the implementation of a ceasefire, violence has continued in the country, as is the case following many of the previous ceasefire agreements. Many parts of the country have seen a decrease in violence, but there has been ongoing fighting between pro and anti government forces near Damascus.¹⁵ The Turkish government has urged the government and its supporters to end the fighting, which threaten the success of the potential peace talks.¹⁶ The ongoing violence weakens the ability of the ceasefire and potential peace talks, which places Syria in an ongoing cycle of failed ceasefires and peace talks.

While all parties to the conflict are likely guilty of human rights violations, the Syrian government’s use of chemical weapons, barrel bombs, torture, and other forms of violence have contributed to its ability to be successful in the conflict. However, it is also likely that these extreme forms of violence will hinder peace efforts after the conflict is over, as opposition groups will continue to be wary of the Syrian government

¹² "Syria conflict: Ceasefire agreed, backed by Russia and Turkey." *BBC News*, December 29, 2016. Accessed December 29, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-38460127>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "Turkey warns Syria talks at risk over truce violations." *Jordan Times*, January 4, 2017. Accessed January 4, 2017. <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/region/turkey-warns-syria-talks-risk-over-truce-violations>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

and may continue to attack the government and vice versa.

This paper will answer the following questions: why has the Syrian conflict gone on for so long? And, why has Assad remained in power? In order to answer these questions, I will address the two major dimensions of the case: 1. The domestic actors and their goals for the outcome of the conflict, 2. the international actors and their goals for the outcome of the conflict, 3. Analyze these factors using existing literature on civil war termination to determine why it has not ended and what the possible outcomes of the conflict are. The literature indicates that the Syrian conflict is not likely to end in the near future and is unlikely to end in negotiated settlement, and will therefore end in a decisive military victory by the Assad government. This outcome will not bring peace to Syria immediately, as it is likely that the Syrian government will continue to crack down on the opposition to prevent future uprisings. This means Syria will most likely be unstable for many years to come.

Literature Review on Weak States and Civil Wars

While many states can witness civil war, Fearon and Latin explain “weak states are so much more civil war prone” as weak states allow for opposition groups to become viable.¹⁷ The Middle East, a region comprised of very weak states, is extremely vulnerable to civil war, and while the details of each civil war that has taken place in the region are different, they share many similarities that can provide lessons for understanding current and future civil wars in the region. The following literature will be used to help understand the complexities of the Syrian conflict, as well as the potential outcomes.

¹⁷ James D. Fearon., and David D. Laitin. "Civil war termination." In *Conference paper*. 2007., 8.

Prior to analyzing weak state and civil war literature it is important to define the concept of a state. Max Weber states that the state “claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical forces within a given territory.”¹⁸ Therefore, a state is a sovereign entity that has control over a territory.

Second, it is essential to understand weak states. A key element of scholarship that focuses on states in the developing world is what to call these states. These states, while often referred to as weak or fragile states, are also commonly called ‘quasi-states.’ Robert Jackson, who created a foundation for the study of ‘quasi-states,’ argues that while these states tend to be former colonial states in the developing world and have sovereignty, they are considered ‘quasi-states’ due to the fact that they “lack institutional features of sovereign states” because of this, states tend to be unstable and prone to failure.¹⁹ Despite being weak or unstable, many of these states continue to exist. These characteristics are often an aftereffect of colonialism and poor state planning by colonial powers and the governments put in place by those colonial powers. In more recent literature, Stanislawski puts these states in three categories: “as-if states,” “almost states,” “black spots,” and “states-within-states”.²⁰ These categories differ from ‘quasi-states’ because they include sovereign states, groups that hope to gain independence, and groups outside of state control, such as criminal or terrorist organizations. While Jackson’s ‘quasi-state’ is still extremely relevant today,

¹⁸ Max Weber. "Politics as a Vocation." (1968), 1.

¹⁹ Robert H. Jackson. *Quasi-states: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World*. New York City: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 21.

²⁰ Bartosz H. Stanislawski. "Para-States, Quasi-States, and Black Spots: Perhaps Not States, But Not “Ungoverned Territories,” Either." *International Studies Review* 10, no. 2 (2008), 371.

Stanislawski's categories are more useful for understanding states like Syria where "black spots" such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and "almost-states" like the Kurdish controlled territories exist. In the study of 'quasi-states' in the 21st century it is important that we include these different entities in our analysis.

Jackson's research points to 'quasi-states' as being a phenomenon in the developing world. 'Quasi-states' and their subsequent failure or collapse may also be linked more specifically to their geographical region.²¹ This indicates that "functional links between sub-state territories in different states are instrumental for understanding the territorial extent of state failure regions."²² Therefore, simply being a 'quasi-state' does not indicate whether or not they will succeed or fail and these 'quasi-states need to be examined in terms of their region as well to understand state identity and where state weakness exists. In cases where state weakness is caused by regional issues, fixing domestic issues will not necessarily solve problems as regional influence could cause the state to become unstable again. Robert Bates, by discussing the impact of conflict on the economy, provides a sample of this type of analysis of the patterns of state failure in Africa in "Political Conflict and State Failure."²³ Regional analysis of 'quasi-states,' state failure, and state collapse is critical for understanding state collapse in the Middle East, as the lack of stability in several states can lead to a larger regional collapse. Pollack and Walter explain that the destabilizing effects of civil wars have an effect on

²¹ Stefan Wolff. "The regional dimensions of state failure." *Review of International Studies* 37, no. 03 (2011), 953.

²² Ibid., 961.

²³ Robert H. Bates. *Political Conflict and State Failure*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

the Middle East and not just within state borders.²⁴ They also argue that the factors that cause civil wars across the Middle East are fairly similar, indicating that the international community can use scholarship on these wars to better understand what causes them and how to end them.²⁵

Many groups involved in civil wars or that exist in weak states hope to achieve statehood. In the case of Syria, groups such as ISIS and the Kurds desire independent states, while the Syrian government aspires to keep the Syrian state as is. Milliken and Krause argue that “the aspiration to viable statehood...rests on a deeply ingrained *assumption* about appropriate forms of political organization and order,” indicating that Jackson’s title of ‘quasi-state’ is suitable for developing states in the developing world because they do not fit the modern idea of the state.²⁶ They argue that Jackson is explaining that we should not just question why and how these states fail, but “how and why they exist or persist at all.”²⁷ Thus, as Stanislawski indicates, we should not limit our analysis of weak states and ‘quasi-states’ to the traditional concept of states and we should include all entities that aspire for independence or have *de facto* independence in our analysis of developing states and their success or failure because states are not the only political entities that make up the post-colonial world. This is evident in the cases of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and the Kurds. These groups are working in different ways to gain a state, but are currently not recognized as such.

²⁴ Kenneth M. Pollack, and Barbara F. Walter. "Escaping the Civil War Trap in the Middle East." *The Washington Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (2015), 29.

²⁵ Ibid., 30.

²⁶ Jennifer Milliken and Keith Krause. "State Failure, State Collapse, and State Reconstruction: Concepts, Lessons and Strategies." *Development and Change* 33, no. 5 (2002), 762-763.

²⁷ Ibid, 763.

Like 'quasi-states,' the concept of "failed states" is an idea that emerged in the 1990s with the case of Somalia.²⁸ Failed states became a security issue after the September 11 attacks when the Western world began to focus on Afghanistan as a failed state due to the fact that al-Qaeda was able to operate within the state.²⁹ Charles Call explains that scholars and practitioners have struggled to come up with criteria to determine whether or not a state is failing, failed, or collapsed.³⁰ Rotberg may provide us with the best indicators of what a failed state looks like. These characteristics range from having civil war, seeing a decline in GDP per capita, to loss of control of territory.³¹ Thus, just as in the discussion of nomenclature for weak states in the developing world, there is not wide consensus on what to call states witnessing failure. As other literature will indicate, there is more consensus on characteristics and the processes of state failure and collapse than precise terminology. In the context of the Syria case, the state is failing as it is currently witnessing civil war and the state has lost control over territory.

A common theme in states that are failing or that experience civil wars is the deep divisions between ethnic or religious groups. As in Iraq, Yugoslavia, Syria, and many other cases a major contributing factor for state collapse is that society is divided and "elites, who are alienated from and/or discriminated against by the state (or perceive themselves to be so)," manipulate tensions between ethnic or religious

²⁸ Charles T. Call. "The Fallacy of the 'Failed State'." *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 8 (2008), 1492.

²⁹ Ibid, 1491.

³⁰ Ibid., 1494.

³¹ Robert I. Rotberg. *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004, 5-9.

groups.³² Jackson also argues that the elite class in these states is narrow and independence from colonial rulers was unlikely to improve the lives of citizens because the elite class often continues to rule in an authoritarian or oppressive manner.³³ These elite ruling classes often emerge with the creation of a national identity and failures in state building.³⁴ James Fearon and David Laitin argue that neither ethnic nor religious grievances or ethnic diversity are the root causes of civil war, but instead sometimes these grievances are a product of civil war.³⁵ Civil war can cause state failure and in some cases, the breakup of the state.

Much of the literature on 'quasi-states' points to the failure of the protection of human rights as an example of the failure of 'quasi-state' government to provide for their citizens.³⁶ This can be linked to the fact that an elite class often controls the government because they often limit the freedoms of other religious or ethnic groups in order to maintain control. The failure to protect human rights also often leads to the government losing legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens and the international community, which is a factor that can lead to state failure. Additionally, as previously discussed, the failure of functions of the state such as the protection of human rights can lead to state failure. This creates a cycle that weak states can get stuck in and cannot easily escape.

³² Badredine Arfi. "State Collapse in a New Theoretical Framework: The Case of Yugoslavia." *International Journal of Sociology* 28, no. 3 (1998), 16.

³³ Robert H. Jackson. *Quasi-states: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World.*, 21

³⁴ Jennifer Milliken and Keith Krause. "State Failure, State Collapse, and State Reconstruction: Concepts, Lessons and Strategies," 759

³⁵ James D. Fearon, and David D. Laitin. "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War." *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (2003), 88.

³⁶ Neil A. Englehart. "State Capacity, State Failure, and Human Rights." *Journal of Peace Research* 46, no. 2 (2009), 164.

While there is limited literature on state collapse and successor states in the 21st century, recent scholarship has discussed the role that non-state actors play in state collapse and the creation of successor states. This scholarship is extremely relevant today due to the rise in non-state actors such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or al-Qaeda in Somalia and Yemen.³⁷ In the post-9/11 world, state failure has often been seen as a reason for the success of terrorist organizations because the state, and sometimes the larger region, lacks the ability to control its own territory, whether that is all of it or part of it.³⁸ Jackson touches on this in his discussion of positive versus negative sovereignty. However, Bridget Coggins warns us that we should be careful in blaming state failure for increased terrorism. Failed states do show an increase in terrorism, but state failure is not the only factor.³⁹ The fact that state failure provides an environment that is ideal for the rise of international crime or terrorist organizations makes failed or weak states an important issue of international security, not only from the perspective of the United States, but the world. The securitization of failed states can also be seen as coming from a Western perspective since much of the concern over failed states being a potential breeding ground more terrorist organizations originated after the September 11 attacks. As Morten Boas and Kathleen Jennings explain, the failed states are sometimes labeled as failures based on whether or not the state is considered a threat.⁴⁰

³⁷ Ioannis Mantzikos. "Somalia and Yemen: The Links between Terrorism and State Failure." *Digest of Middle East Studies* 20, no. 2 (2011): 242-60.

³⁸ Stefan Wolff. "The Regional Dimensions of State Failure," 961.

³⁹ Bridget L. Coggins. "Does State Failure Cause Terrorism? An Empirical Analysis (1999–2008)." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 3 (2015), 477.

⁴⁰ Morten Boas and Kathleen Jennings. "'Failed States' and 'State Failure': Threats or Opportunities?" *Globalizations* 4, no. 4 (2007): 475-485.

Civil wars are complex events that are often followed by periods of instability. According to Barbara Walter, there are three reasons why rationalists believe negotiated settlements are rarely the outcome of civil wars because “negotiated settlements are so rare because the benefits of winning a civil war are so much greater..., domestic stakes are either difficult or impossible to divide, and this makes a shared settlement infeasible..., [and] extremist demands, ambitious leaders, poor communication, fear, and erratic outside aid limit the range of tolerable solutions and make mutually acceptable bargains difficult to locate.”⁴¹ However, Walter says that the ideational schools of thought believe that civil wars are less rationally motivated and “involve deep issues of ethnic and cultural identity, of recognition, and of participation that are usually denied to ethnic minorities, in addition to ... other values that are not negotiable.”⁴² The Syrian conflict fits into both schools of thought as so much is at stake for all parties and deep societal divisions have made a negotiated settlement nearly impossible.

Additionally, the literature demonstrates that civil wars are not only difficult to end, but generally last longer than interstate wars.⁴³ Civil wars last longer for a variety of reasons. One of the primary factors is international support to opposition groups and the government; if there is international support, civil wars are likely to last even longer.⁴⁴ Not only does foreign support cause civil wars to last longer, it also can ensure military victory.⁴⁵ Sawyer et al. argue that “highly fungible external support has a

⁴¹ Walter, Barbara F. "The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement." *International Organization* 51, no. 3 (1997), 342.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ James D. Fearon, and David D. Laitin. "Civil War Termination." In *Conference paper*. 2007., 2.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 29.

negative effect on the likelihood of a conflict ending.”⁴⁶ They explain that there are various types of support, such as weapons, intelligence, troop support, and territorial and that some types of external support are more likely to have an effect on civil war termination than others.⁴⁷

This literature on weak states and civil war termination provides scholars with an important understanding of what weak states are and why civil wars end or take years to end. Since civil wars share many of the same features, this literature can help us to better comprehend why the Syrian state functions in the way it does, the complexities of the Syrian conflict, and why the international community has failed to end it as of 2017, or the beginning of the seventh year of conflict. As this paper will explain, the literature indicates that the Syrian conflict will last much longer and is not likely to end in a negotiated settlement.

⁴⁶Katherine Sawyer, Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, and William Reed. "The Role of External Support in Civil War Termination." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2017, 11.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 12-15.

Chapter 2: Domestic Actors

A major reason the conflict has been going on is the number of actors within Syria. The opposition, which includes moderate groups, jihadist groups, such as Daesh, and the Kurds, is extremely splintered and lacks a cohesive goal for the future of Syria. On the other hand, the Asad government has the clear goal of remaining power and regaining control over the entirety of Syria. The way the international community has contributed to the length and complexity of the conflict will be discussed in the following chapter.

This chapter will discuss the strengths and weaknesses as well as goals of the following actors: the Asad government and the opposition, which includes groups deemed “moderate” by the West, jihadist groups, and the Kurds. Since the opposition contains thousands of groups, it is beyond the scope of this paper to address the goals of each individual group, thus this division will provide a broad overview of what the different aspects of the opposition desire. As civil war literature demonstrates, a large number of actors can prolong a conflict and can hinder efforts at negotiated settlement due to a lack of unity regarding the goals for the future of the state.

The Asad Government

Hafez al-Asad and the Ba’ath Party

To understand why the protests began and why they resulted in violent conflict, it is important to understand the reign of Hafez al-Asad and the Ba’ath Party, which has defined Syrian society since the 1970s. Hafez al-Asad’s governing style and personality were shaped by his upbringing in the poor Alawite communities that were often oppressed by the French colonists. Asad, the first Syrian leader from the peasant class,

declared in a speech in 1980, “I am first and last...a peasant and the son of a peasant... No matter how far the past sinks away, it is necessary to keep these images alive in our minds...for what we endured forms an essential part of the way we view things and of the foundation on which we build the present and the future.”⁴⁸ Asad, as described by his biographer, Patrick Seale, is the Syrian Charles de Gaulle, as he implemented ideas of Arab nationalism and socialism and modernization policies.⁴⁹ However, Asad, like the French, manipulated religious groups and ruled in an authoritarian manner.⁵⁰ Despite the fact that the Alawite leader was able to manipulate groups, which perpetuated the understanding that Alawites were better off than Sunnis; however, in reality, Alawites are not better off economically.⁵¹ Despite this, “Syrians seemingly lived without outward reference to religious difference. Sunni, Shia, Christian, and Alawite had friendships and did business.”⁵² Despite Asad’s manipulations of religious groups, sectarian tensions are not necessarily the root cause of the Syrian civil war, but may be a product of continuous elite exploitation and grievances created by the civil war.⁵³ People have started to identify by sect out of fear, just as people did during the Lebanese Civil War and after the 2003 invasion of Iraq.⁵⁴ While literature on weak states explains that elite classes often are the creators of sectarian and ethnic divisions, in the case of Syria, sectarian conflict is primarily a product of the conflict.

⁴⁸ Hanna Batatu. *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics*. Princeton University Press, 1999, 193-194.

⁴⁹ Patrick Seale. *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, 441.

⁵⁰ Reese Elrich, and Noam Chomsky. *Inside Syria: The Backstory of Their Civil War and What the World Can Expect*. Prometheus Books, 2014, 53.

⁵¹ Charles Glass. *Syria Burning: A Short History of a Catastrophe*, 100.

⁵² Ibid., 69.

⁵³ James D. Fearon, and David D. Laitin. "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War.", 88.

⁵⁴ Charles Glass. *Syria Burning: A Short History of a Catastrophe*, 105.

Alawites are mainly concentrated along the coast in the governorates of Latakia and Tartous. They make up approximately 12% of the population and are an offshoot of Shia Islam. Some believe they are not Muslims, however, Syrian Alawites insist they are, as the Syrian constitution states that the President must be a Muslim.⁵⁵ Sunni Muslims make up a majority of the population, but have not ruled over the country and have been oppressed by the Alawites throughout their rule. One of the most infamous events of Hafez al-Asad's rule was the massacre of Sunni Muslims in Hama in 1982 in order to stop an uprising by the Muslim Brotherhood. This event foreshadowed how Bashar al-Asad would respond to the uprisings in 2011. Thomas Friedman credits this response to tribe-like politics. Due to this attitude, Asad "understood that if the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood was allowed to seize control of even one neighborhood in Hama, then the Alawites' blood would be in the water and all their other opponents in Syria would be feeding on them within days."⁵⁶ Therefore, he felt that he had to do that "was devastating enough to be felt in the gut of every Syrian."⁵⁷ Bashar would use this same attitude to respond to the Arab Spring, as he understood that compromise would only lead to a loss of power.

Under Asad's rule, Damascus grew rapidly, rural areas saw economic growth, women were elected to parliament, and the Alawite community saw improvements in their lives. However, the state was continuously plagued with economic difficulties, diplomatic battles, war with Israel, corruption and human rights abuses. Under the Asad

⁵⁵ "Syria's Alawites, a secretive and persecuted sect." *Reuters*, 2 February 2012. Accessed 12 April 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-alawites-sect-idUSTRE8110Q720120202>.

⁵⁶ Thomas L. Friedman. *From Beirut to Jerusalem : Updated with a New Chapter*. New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1995, 90.

⁵⁷ Patrick Seale. *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East*, 441.

government “there was no truly independent judiciary, no freedom of information, association or expression, and no autonomous university.”⁵⁸ People lived in fear that they would be arrested and tortured by security forces.⁵⁹ Despite the fact that some saw improvements over French mandate rule, Asad’s oppressive rule frustrated and angered many.

Bashar al-Asad and Pro-Government Actors

Bashar al-Asad became President of Syria following the death of his father in 2000 and Syrians were hopeful that political change would follow.⁶⁰ However, his election, which occurred because of demands by the public to have an election, was simply a formality and his rule would be a continuation of his father’s. His inaugural speech in July 2000 promised economic reform and stated that the state had been a major obstacle to economic development and therefore Syria should shift away from the past in order to eliminate obstacles to development.⁶¹ Asad formed discussion groups early on, but within several months the discussion groups were shut down and he began to arrest those who opposed him and the human rights situation had not made many improvements.⁶² Asad began to follow in his father’s footsteps, by placing people close to him in powerful positions. Some claim that Bashar’s brother, Maher, the head of the Syrian army and commander of the Presidential Guard, discouraged him from making

⁵⁸ Ibid, 458.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 458.

⁶⁰ Heather Horn. "To Know a Tyrant: Inside Bashar al-Assad's Transformation From 'Reformer' to Killer." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 18 September 2012. Accessed 13 April 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/09/to-know-a-tyrant-inside-bashar-al-assads-transformation-from-reformer-to-killer/262486/>.

⁶¹ David W. Lesch. *The New Lion of Damascus: Bashar al-Asad and modern Syria*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005, 81-82.

⁶² Jim Muir. "Bashar Al-Assad's Tightening Grip on Syria 10 Years on." BBC News. July 17, 2010. Accessed August 1, 2016. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-10674093>.; Lesch. *The New Lion of Damascus: Bashar al-Asad and modern Syria*., 84.

political reform, but it is clear that Asad wanted to maintain power and free and fair elections might limit his ability to do so. This instilled a sense that Syrian institutions were based on loyalty to Asad rather than to state institutions and laws itself, which is something that occurs often in weak states. In the years prior to the civil war there had been pressure on Asad by the United States to allow opposition parties to form and the opposition stated that they wanted to learn from the lessons of Iraq and have this process occur without war or intervention.⁶³ When the protests began in 2011, Asad once again promised change, but this attempt at reform came far too late. Asad ended emergency laws that had been in place for decades and said nothing else about long-term changes.⁶⁴

The friendly relations, or at least the appearance of friendly relations, between religious groups began to collapse as a result of Asad's continuation of authoritarian rule and because of factors relating to the conflict. Religion likely became a centerpiece of the conflict because of external support by Sunni and Shia states that will be discussed later. This support made opposition groups prioritize religion as part of their identity in order to receive support from particular countries.

Who Supports the Asad Government?

Within Syria, Asad's main supporters, aside from the government and the Syrian Armed Forces, are minority groups, such as Alawites and Christians. The Asad government has had a history of protecting the interests of other minority groups, so it has been in the best interests of these groups to maintain relations with the government.

⁶³ Reese Elrich, and Noam Chomsky. *Inside Syria: The Backstory of Their Civil War and What the World Can Expect.*, 74-79.

⁶⁴ Stephen Starr. *Revolt in Syria: Eye-witness to the Uprising.* 2nd ed., 50-51.

Additionally, many minority groups fear a takeover by radical Islamist groups and have turned to the Asad government for protection. Armed groups, such as Sootoro, or the Syriac Protection Office, that operates in Qashmali in northern Syria, have been involved in clashes with the opposition and ISIS.⁶⁵ However, Asad receives much of its support from external actors, such as Russia and Hezbollah. As these groups all have the goal of keeping Asad in power, his support is much more unified than that of the opposition. This has contributed to Asad's military success in the conflict.

Goals of the Asad Government

In 2016, Bashar al-Asad proclaimed that he would retake the entirety of Syria “without hesitation.”⁶⁶ In sum, Asad hopes for his government to survive. To be successful, Asad will need to continue on his path to military victory and take action after the end of the civil war to ensure he can suppress the opposition and maintain stability in the country. While Asad may succeed in doing so with regards to opposition-held areas in Western Syria, as is clear from his recent military success, he may face more of a challenge when it comes to retaking territory from ISIS. Additionally, since ISIS is as much an ideology as it is an organization, the Syrian government may be able to retake territory, but it might not necessarily be able to prevent future attacks by the group across ISIS. Finally, as will be explained in the following chapter, Asad's goals are reinforced with help from Russia, Iran, and foreign armed groups, such as Hezbollah, who all have stakes in keeping Asad in power.

⁶⁵ Kaitlin Peach. “Sootoro (Report for the Carter Center Palantir Database).” 22 July 2016.

⁶⁶ “Assad vows to retake all of Syria 'without hesitation'” *Al Jazeera English*, February 12, 2016. Accessed April 12, 2017 <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/02/assad-vows-retake-syria-hesitation-160212141345408.html>.

The Opposition

The opposition in Syria encompasses all those that are opposed to the Syrian government, which can include the Kurdish groups, moderate groups, and extremist groups like Jabhat Fatah al-Sham. Opposition groups are divided on ideological lines. Since there are thousands of opposition groups, with new groups forming and old ones breaking apart, it is beyond the scope of this paper to assess each group, this section will discuss the opposition as broad entities, such as the Kurds, the Syrian National Council, and extremists groups in order to explain the splintered goals of the opposition and why there is a lack of unification within the opposition.

The Syrian National Coalition

The Syrian National Coalition (SNC) was formed in 2012 in order to unite the opposition and work towards a plan for political transition. The SNC hoped to be able to “an important role in liaising between the needs of the Syrian people and the international community.”⁶⁷ The United States considers the primary opposition entity to be the SNC, which aims to “do everything in its power to reach the goal of overthrowing the Assad regime and bring victory to the revolution both inside and outside of Syria” and to establish an internationally recognized government.⁶⁸ The SNC is considered to be the primary opposition group as the United States views it as more moderate than others. The SNC is generally discussed as the opposition because it has a wider representation, its history can be traced, and it has received international recognition, but it is by no means the only opposition group, nor does it have much

⁶⁷ "Guide to the Syrian opposition." BBC News. October 17, 2013. Accessed May 9, 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-15798218>.

⁶⁸ "Mission Statement and Goals." Syrian National Coalition Of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces. Accessed December 26, 2016. <http://en.etilaf.org/about-us/goals.html>.

legitimacy because it is not the only group.⁶⁹ The SNC maintains that Syria's sovereignty must be preserved and therefore "struggle is against the Assad regime, not against the State of Syria. In this regard, we will preserve state institutions and structures, but reorganize them for the purpose of protecting the state and its employees who are not corrupt and have no blood on their hands, including military and security personnel."⁷⁰ This indicates that the SNC does not want to work with Asad in establishing a post-conflict government, but that they will do everything they can to preserve the Syrian state.

While the SNC is primarily a political entity, it did oversee the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in the early days of the conflict. The FSA was formed by defectors from the Syrian Arab Army (SAA), which the United States views as a moderate group in the conflict. However, as the conflict has progressed, the FSA's identity has changed. The name FSA has been used "mostly as a term for the armed uprising in general" since many militias have self-declared themselves as part of the FSA, but it has also been used to refer to "to army defectors (ex-Baathists), non-ideological fighters, and more moderate Islamists."⁷¹ Therefore, it can be challenging to describe the FSA as an organization, since it lacks organization and the term is often used to refer to a variety of different actors. Additionally, this demonstrates that even within what many consider to be a unified opposition group, there is a great deal of division.

⁶⁹ Ufuk Ulutas. "The Syrian Political Opposition: What Went Wrong?" *Insight Turkey* 18, no. 2 (2016), 34.

⁷⁰"Declaration by the National Coalition For Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces." Syrian National Coalition Of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces. Accessed December 26, 2016. <http://en.etilaf.org/coalition-documents/declaration-by-the-national-coalition-for-syrian-revolutionary-and-opposition-forces.html>

⁷¹ Aron Lund. "The Free Syrian Army Doesn't Exist." *Syria Comment*, March 17, 2013. Accessed April 4, 2017. <http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/the-free-syrian-army-doesnt-exist/>.

The Failure of the Moderate Opposition

The moderate opposition in Syria failed to unite and be a cohesive force that could remove Asad from power. In part, this was because “the United States’ actions haven’t matched its rhetoric.” The United States began their support of the opposition two years into the war, after extremist groups had begun to develop. The United States was reluctant to provide the opposition with weapons and it could not prevent “moderate” groups from working with radical groups like Jabhat Fatah al-Sham.

The SNC was formed after the United States and other countries pressured the opposition to unite. However, the SNC failed to represent all opposition groups, including Islamist factions.⁷² Since its creation, the SNC has failed to unite on a variety of issues, including Kurdish rights and how to respond to violence by the Syrian government.⁷³ These issues, including the United States reluctance to arm the moderate opposition, resulted in the failure to create a cohesive, moderate opposition that could prove to be successful in forcing Asad from power.

Extremist Groups: The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and Jabhat al-Nusra

Syria has traditionally been a moderate state, however, the conflict has contributed to the radicalization of the state. Nader Hashemi, the director of the Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Denver argues that the conflict itself and the ideological battle that is taking place across the Middle East led to the radicalization of groups. Hashemi says that in conflict, “you don’t produce liberal, democratic opinion. You produce the antithesis of it: an environment that reflects the social

⁷² “The Syrian National Council.” Carnegie Middle East Center. September 25, 2013. Accessed May 10, 2017. <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/48334?lang=en>.

⁷³ Ibid.

conditions of chaos and anarchy.”⁷⁴ Additionally, there has been a rise in various forms of radical Islamism since the Arab Spring. The development of radical groups in Syria began because opportunities for political change began to diminish and “human-rights violations and repressions [fed] into a narrative of radical extremism and they [were able to] undermine the prospects for more democratic and more moderate expressions of political Islam.”⁷⁵ Extremist groups, especially Sunni groups, “offer a simplistic political platform” and have had more success in battle than moderate groups, which has contributed to their popularity.⁷⁶

Groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra) have contributed to the complicated nature of the conflict by further dividing the opposition. These groups are what Stanislawski refers to as “black spots,” and in some senses, “almost-states” due to the nature of ISIS’ goals to create an Islamic state.⁷⁷ Groups like ISIS and Jabhat Fatah al-Sham threaten the stability of the state and, like the rest of the opposition, the legitimacy of the government.

ISIS, led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, emerged out of post-war Iraq, but the organization became associated with the Syrian conflict in 2014 when they declared a caliphate and quickly took control of cities across Iraq and Syria.⁷⁸ The organization quickly gained attention as it beheaded western journalists, slaughtered Yazidis, and

⁷⁴ Katarina Montgomery. "Understanding the Drivers of Radicalization in Syria." Syria Deeply. April 22, 2016. Accessed May 9, 2017. <https://www.newsdeeply.com/syria/articles/2014/12/11/understanding-the-drivers-of-radicalization-in-syria>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Bartosz H. Stanislawski "Para-States, Quasi-States, and Black Spots: Perhaps Not States, But Not “Ungoverned Territories,” Either.", 371.

⁷⁸ Sami M. Moubayed *Under The Black Flag: At the Frontier of the New Jihad*. New York: I.B. Tauris&Co., 2015, 122.

began to recruit young adults from all over the world. ISIS has also played a role in spreading the conflict beyond the borders of Syria. Its popularity around the world and the fear many people have of the group due to attacks such as those in Paris (13 November 2015) and Berlin (19 December 2016) perpetrated by ISIS fighters or sympathizers has caused much of the world to focus on the threat of transnational terrorism and its role in Syria and Iraq, rather than to focus on atrocities committed by the Asad government within Syria's borders. ISIS appealed to Syrians and Iraqis because it provides a source of leadership, employment, and resources that many citizens lacked because of state weakness.⁷⁹ The elimination of ISIS is a major point of contention in the international community, because many are unsure if removing Asad will create greater instability in the country and allow for ISIS to gain more territory and power because it may create a power vacuum.

Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, led by Abu Mohammed al-Jolani began as an affiliate of al-Qaeda in Iraq.⁸⁰ The group was originally known as Jabhat al-Nusra, but changed its name in 2016 because the group cut ties with al-Qaeda in an attempt to dissociate itself from al-Qaeda, to be removed from the US terror watch list, and to rebrand the group so it would be considered a revolutionary group rather than a jihadist group.⁸¹ These efforts have thus far been unsuccessful as the United States still views it as a terrorist organization.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 131.

⁸⁰ Reese Elrich and Noam Chomsky. *Inside Syria: The Backstory of Their Civil War and What the World Can Expect.*, 97.

⁸¹ Martin Chulov. "Al-Nusra Front cuts ties with al-Qaida and renames itself." *The Guardian*, July 28, 2016. Accessed December 26, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/28/al-qaida-syria-nusra-split-terror-network>.

Groups such as ISIS and Jabhat Fatah al-Sham hope to remove the Asad government and establish an Islamic state. For ISIS, “the caliphate represents the onset of a new era of “might and dignity” for the Muslims.”⁸² This ideology has made Islamist groups extremely successful, not only in Syria, but around the world. Additionally, Islamist groups have worked to achieve their goals of establishing a state by “establishing an efficient and well-disciplined structure for the distribution of food and medicine,” as well as providing governance and providing people with services that the Syrian government has not been able to provide.⁸³

The Kurds and the Syrian Democratic Forces

The Kurds differ from other opposition groups in that they are ethnically, rather than religiously united and have the goal of building an independent Kurdistan. The Kurdish population across the Middle East has been vying for its own independent Kurdistan carved out of Turkey, Syria, and Iraq and the Kurdish population of Syria became “a burgeoning center of newly empowered Kurdish nationalism and autonomy due to the forces set forth by the civil war.”⁸⁴ Early in the conflict, the various Kurdish groups called for greater rights within in Syria including recognition as citizens, the right to their language and culture, and some political control, or autonomy in Kurdish areas.⁸⁵ These interests evolved, leading Kurdish leadership to discuss the creation of Rojava, short for Rojavayê Kurdistanê (Western Kurdistan), or officially The

⁸² Ahmed S. Hashim. "The Islamic State: From Al-Qaeda Affiliate to Caliphate." *Middle East Policy* 21, no. 4 (2014), 73.

⁸³ Ibid., 77.

⁸⁴ Michael Gunter. "Unrecognized De Facto States in World Politics: The Kurds." *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 20, no. 2 (2014), 173.

⁸⁵ Reese Elrich and Noam Chomsky. *Inside Syria: The Backstory of Their Civil War and What the World Can Expect*, 179.

Democratic Federal System of Northern Syria, a Kurdish state in northern Syria after the success the SDF had in recapturing Manbij from ISIS in 2016.⁸⁶ The second name is used to demonstrate that Syrian Kurds only aspire to have autonomy, rather than independence. However, it may be the case that like Iraqi Kurdish leaders, their actual aspirations are independence, with autonomy being a step in that direction.

In Syria, the Kurds have been discriminated against since before Hafiz al-Asad took power because the prior leaders did not trust them.⁸⁷ Some Kurds were denied citizenship in the Hasaka census that took place in 1962, which made it challenging for them to get jobs, receive higher education or healthcare.⁸⁸ The census took place in one day in the province of Hasaka in an effort to identify Kurds that had illegally entered Syria and obtained citizenship. To prove they were legal citizens, people had to provide proof of residency prior to 1945.⁸⁹ The census only affected Kurds in the region and left between 120,000 and 150,000 Kurds stateless.⁹⁰ However, the civil war has enabled the Kurds to experiment with democratic governance, that encourages ethnic and gender balances.⁹¹ It is unlikely though, that the Kurds will be successful in seceding as the area they live in is not strictly a Kurdish area because “large numbers of Arabs were deliberately settled in areas with large Kurdish populations through land reclamation

⁸⁶ "Syrian Kurdistan drops Rojava word in its draft constitution." Rudaw. December 29, 2016. Accessed January 4, 2017. <http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/28122016>.

⁸⁷ Reese Elrich and Noam Chomsky. *Inside Syria: The Backstory of Their Civil War and What the World Can Expect*, 176,

⁸⁸ Ibid. ; John McHugo. *Syria: A Recent History*. London: Saqi Books, 2015. Nook eBook., 235.

⁸⁹ Harriet Allsopp. *The Kurds of Syria: Political Parties and Identity in the Middle East*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2014, 24.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Si Sheppard. "What the Syrian Kurds Have Wrought." *The Atlantic*, October 25, 2016. Accessed January 4, 2017. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/10/kurds-rojava-syria-isis-iraq-assad/505037/>.

projects.”⁹² Additionally, the Kurds have their own political divisions and Turkey strongly objects to an independent Kurdish area.

The Kurds, under the name People’s Protection Unit (YPG), have fought against the Syrian government as well as ISIS and other opposition groups. The YPG has been extremely successful against ISIS and has received support from the United States because of this. The YPG has traditionally allied with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a militia made up of Arabs and Kurds. The United States wants to use Kurdish success and the SDF “as an incubator to breed Sunni Arab militias able to take over where Kurdish territory ends and push deep into Islamic State’s heartland, which is in the Sunni Arab tribal region that connects Syria with Iraq.”⁹³ However, it is not clear that the Kurds share this goal.

Conclusions

As the civil war literature indicates, the splintered nature of the domestic actors in the Syrian conflict are a primary reason the conflict has gone on for six years and will likely last even longer.⁹⁴ Asad’s government has had more success due to the unity of support he has received both domestically and internationally. The splintered nature of the opposition and the fighting amongst the groups makes it lack the legitimacy needed to be a viable alternative to the Asad government. “Disunity, power struggles, and lack of direction have characterized the opposition, and half-hearted international backers

⁹² John McHugo. *Syria: A Recent History*, 235.

⁹³ Aron Lund. "Origins of the Syrian Democratic Forces: A Primer." *Syria Deeply*, January 22, 2016. Accessed April 13, 2017. <https://www.newsdeeply.com/syria/articles/2016/01/22/origins-of-the-syrian-democratic-forces-a-primer>.

⁹⁴ Max Fisher. "Political science says Syria’s civil war will probably last at least another decade." *The Washington Post*. October 23, 2013. Accessed May 9, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/10/23/political-science-says-syrias-civil-war-will-probably-last-at-least-another-decade/?utm_term=.0a8484bf7bea.

with conflicting agendas have deepened the divides within the opposition.”⁹⁵ To be successful, an insurgency must have strong unity of effort and with disorganization and a lack of agreement on what Syria’s future should look like, the opposition’s efforts are weak. Thus, the nature of the opposition has contributed to the length of the conflict, and as civil war literature explains, has caused international actors to get involved in the conflict and further complicate the dynamics of the conflict.⁹⁶

While many blame the international community for being what civil war literature calls, “spoilers” or “leaders and parties who believe that peace emerging from negotiations threatens their power, worldview, and interests, and use violence to undermine attempts to achieve it,” the domestic actors also fit into this category.⁹⁷ The opposition and the government have made military victory their priority, rather than working towards a negotiated peace.

⁹⁵ Ufuk Ulutas. "The Syrian Political Opposition: What Went Wrong?", 33.

⁹⁶ Katherine Sawyer, Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, and William Reed. "The Role of External Support in Civil War Termination", 32.

⁹⁷ Stephen John Stedman. "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes. (problems in Peacemaking)." *International Security* 22, no. 2 (1997), 5.

Chapter 3: International Involvement

For much of its history, Syria has been the center of international involvement in the Middle East due to its strategic position. During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union competed for influence over Syria. Mohammed Ayoob argues that the Syrian conflict shares many characteristics with the Arab Cold War, except in that Iran has introduced a sectarian (Shia versus Sunni) aspect to it.⁹⁸ Major powers such as the United States and Russia have become involved and many countries in Europe are indirectly affected by the conflict due to the massive influx of Syrian refugees. The proxy war that is occurring between anti-Asad and pro-Asad powers has complicated the war and made it much more challenging for there to be an end to the conflict. The international actors involved in the conflict have armed their proxies enough so that they would not lose the war, but not enough to win. This has fueled the conflict and encouraged groups to keep fighting, rather than pursue negotiated settlement.

This chapter will discuss the involvement and goals of the primary international actors: the United States, Russia, Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia and will then provide an overview of the peace process thus far (2011-April 2017) to demonstrate how negotiated settlement has failed to solve the conflict and is not the likely outcome for the conflict, as civil war literature demonstrates.

Russia

Russia has been a long-time ally of the Asad government. Hafez-al Asad first travelled to the Soviet Union in 1958 while he was an officer in the Syrian air force in order to

⁹⁸ Mohammed Ayoob. "The Arab Spring: Its Geostrategic Significance." *Middle East Policy* 19, no. 3 (2012), 84.

take a course on how to fly MiG-15s and MiG-17s at night.⁹⁹ Asad worked to develop a relationship with Russia and under Bashar al-Asad, Russia became Syria's biggest arms supplier.¹⁰⁰ Russia benefits from Syria as it is an important intelligence post. However, much of Russia's support for Syria has been because of Western involvement in the Middle East. The Kremlin "seeing uprisings against authoritarian leaders as American conspiracies."¹⁰¹ If Russia allowed Asad to be removed from power, it could be perceived as if they are conceding to Western, more specifically, American pressure. Russia's involvement in Syria has also proved to distract the West from its involvement in the Ukraine.¹⁰² Russia is also motivated to fight Islamist groups like ISIS as it has faced an increased threat from jihadist groups within Russia. Russia is concerned that if ISIS succeeds in Syria, that this will inspire Chechens who have joined the group.¹⁰³ Thus, it is in Russia's interest to keep its ally in power in order to maintain influence in the region, protect its interests abroad, and to eliminate jihadist influence within Russian borders.

Russia has showed continued support for the Syrian government since the beginning of the conflict, commonly in the form of aerial bombardments that indiscriminately target civilians. Russia's staunch support of the Asad government has exacerbated tensions between the United States and Russia. However, since the election of Donald Trump it is unclear what the future of Russian-American relations regarding

⁹⁹ Patrick Seale. *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, 57.

¹⁰⁰ "Why Russia is an ally of Assad." *The Economist*, September 30, 2015. Accessed April 22, 2017. <http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2015/09/economist-explains-22?fsrc=scn%2Ffb%2Fte%2Fbl%2Fed%2Fwhyrussiaisanallyofassad>.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Matthew Chance. "Syria: 5 things Russia wants in war." *CNN*, February 8, 2016. Accessed April 22, 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2016/02/08/middleeast/syria-aleppo-russia-strategy/>.

Syria will look like. Trump has shown a desire to work with Russia, and has lacked a consistent policy on Syria.

Asad's military has been successful due to the support that Russia has provided over the course of the conflict. The Syrian military has been spread thin as it tries to fight the opposition in the West and attempts to retake territory from ISIS in the east. As the literature on civil war indicates, international involvement often lengthens a conflict and Russia's involvement has done exactly that. Russia's air support has allowed for pro-Asad forces to easily retake territory and devastate cities, as was demonstrated in Aleppo.

Iran and Hezbollah

Iran has also been a long-time ally of the Asad government and the relationship became "solidly cemented in the early 1980s with the formation of Hezbollah."¹⁰⁴ Iran and Hezbollah have been traditional allies of Syria in the Axis of Resistance against the United States and Israel.¹⁰⁵ The Iranian government attempted to reach a deal with the Syrian government and told Asad that "it would be wise to hold free and fair elections."¹⁰⁶ Both the Syrian government and the Syrian opposition opposed this proposal because the government felt that they could stop the revolution and the opposition did not trust Iran or the Syrian government.¹⁰⁷ Iran's primary concern is that if the Asad government fell, the new government would have stronger ties to the United

¹⁰⁴ Reese Elrich and Noam Chomsky. *Inside Syria: The Backstory of Their Civil War and What the World Can Expect* 148.

¹⁰⁵ Marisa Sullivan. "Hezbollah in Syria." Institute for the Study of War. April 2014. Accessed April 22, 2017. http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Hezbollah_Sullivan_FINAL.pdf, 9.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 151.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

States and Israel and that therefore Iran's regional influence would be weakened.¹⁰⁸

Thus, Iran has allied with Russia in order to keep Asad in power and to maintain its influence in the Levant. However, Iran is also looking to ensure that it can maintain influence in the Levant if Asad does fall by allying with Shia militias from across the Middle East. Iran's staunch support of the Asad government and Shia militias against opposition groups supported by Sunni-majority countries reinforces the Sunni-Shia divide within the region. These parties are fighting to create a version of Syria that benefits them, all the while fighting a Sunni-Shia proxy war.

While Iran's involvement in the conflict is known, it is not clear what the scope of their involvement is, demonstrating "its ability to work within low-intensity-conflict environments while successfully obfuscating details about its operations, as it did in Iraq during the latter half of the Iraq War."¹⁰⁹ Iran has provided the Syrian military with supplies and training and military assistance to *shabiha* militias.¹¹⁰ "Iran has conducted this foreign internal defense mission in Syria using its regular Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) forces alongside the IRGC Quds Force and other clandestine services, marking a new kind of Iranian expeditionary military strategy."¹¹¹ In the beginning of the conflict, Iran's support focused on counterinsurgency operations as Asad was losing territory to opposition groups.¹¹²

Hezbollah has been involved in the conflict since 2013 and "they have enabled

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 150.

¹⁰⁹ Will Fulton Joseph Holliday, and Sam Wyer. "Iranian Strategy in Syria." Institute for the Study of War. 2013. Accessed April 22, 2017.
<http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/IranianStrategyinSyria-1MAY.pdf>,

10.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 9.

¹¹² Ibid.

the regime to regain control of rebel-held areas in central Syria and have improved the effectiveness of pro-regime forces.”¹¹³ Hezbollah provides training to Syria’s National Defense Force (NDF) and other pro-government forces, as well as tactical support.¹¹⁴ Hezbollah fighters have noted that one of the major problems the Syrian military had was their lack of training and skill. Hezbollah has increased the effectiveness of the Syrian military through training and proved to be especially important as the conflict shifted from counterinsurgency to civil war. Hezbollah’s goals in Syria are similar to Iran’s in that it would like to maintain the Axis of Resistance and Shia/Alawite influence in the Levant. Hezbollah has been assisted by other Shia militias from Iraq.

Turkey

Turkey has provided support to the FSA along with the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar.¹¹⁵ Turkey has also worked with the United States on training soldiers who have defected from the Syrian military.¹¹⁶ Overall, Turkey’s support has been primarily to Sunni opposition groups. Turkey, like Syria’s Arab neighbors, has had domestic challenges with the conflict as well. ISIS has carried out attacks in Turkey and Turkey has been flooded with refugees. Thus, Turkey and others that support the opposition want the outcome of the conflict to be the removal of Bashar al-Asad.

However, Turkey’s relationship with the United States regarding the Syrian conflict has been complicated. As was discussed in the domestic actors chapter, The United States has supported the Kurdish-led YPG. Turkey views the YPG as a wing of

¹¹³ Marisa Sullivan. "Hezbollah in Syria.", 4.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Reese Elrich and Noam Chomsky. *Inside Syria: The Backstory of Their Civil War and What the World Can Expect*, 94.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 95.

the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has been a threat to Turkish national security for several decades. Turkey is concerned that the Kurds in Syria may gain autonomy or an independent state and may push for Turkey's Kurds to join the state. Turkey has long been opposed to any kind of Kurdish autonomy as it contradicts the idea of Turkish nationalism.

Turkey has also had a complicated relationship with Russia throughout the conflict. In 2017, Turkey, Russia, and Iran partnered in the Astana Peace Talks (which are discussed in the peace process section of this chapter); however, relations have been tense as Russia supports the YPG, since they view them as key to fighting ISIS.¹¹⁷ Additionally, Turkish-Russian relations were strained when the Turkish air force shot down a Russian plane in 2015. However, Turkey's new partnership with Russia appears to indicate that the Turkish government's policy has shifted towards accepting a settlement where Assad is included.

The United States

The United States has been slightly less involved role than Iran and Russia. In the beginning of the conflict, the United States officially supported nonviolent resistance by the SNC. In the meantime, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was overseeing arms shipments to the FSA.¹¹⁸ A major concern for the United States is the spread of terrorism and the popularity of ISIS. The United States views ISIS as a threat not only internally, but to its interests abroad. Additionally, the United States' support of the majority-Kurdish SDF has result in tensions between the United States and their

¹¹⁷ Dorian Jones. "Russia Deals Major Blow to Turkey's Syria Policy." Voice of America. March 22, 2017. Accessed April 22, 2017. <http://www.voanews.com/a/russia-turkey-syria-kurds/3777443.html>.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 213-14.

NATO ally, Turkey, which strongly opposes the creation of a Kurdish state. The United States has maintained limited involvement out of reluctance to get involved in another Iraq or Afghanistan.

Early in the conflict, the Obama Administration called for Asad to step down.¹¹⁹ However, the Administration did not act on it, nor did it really have any intention on acting on it. The Administration supported democratic transition, but as is indicated by the diversity of the goals of the Syrian opposition, it was difficult for the Administration to back a particular group to ensure democratic transition would take place. The Obama Administration also discussed the infamous “red line” regarding Syria’s use of chemical weapons, as was discussed in the history section. While the Obama Administration did not use military force in response to chemical weapons use, the United States and Russia reached an agreement to dispose of Syria’s chemical weapons stockpile. The agreement resulted in “the removal from Syria of 1,300 metric tons of weapons-grade chemicals—including ingredients for the nerve agents sarin and VX—as well as the destruction of chemical munitions, labs, and mixing equipment.”¹²⁰ However, it appears this deal was allowed to fall apart due to a lack of enforcement mechanism because of Russia’s insistence that sanctions could not be used if Syria was found in violation of the agreement.¹²¹

The United States’ biggest failure in Syria was its failure to create a cohesive moderate opposition group at the start of the conflict. Dr. Joshua Landis argues the

¹¹⁹ John Judis. "America's Failure — and Russia and Iran's Success — in Syria's Cataclysmic Civil War." TPM. January 10, 2017. Accessed April 17, 2017. <http://talkingpointsmemo.com/cafe/americas-failure-russia-success-in-syrias-war>.

¹²⁰ Hisham Melhem. "How Obama's Syrian Chemical Weapons Deal Fell Apart." *The Atlantic*, April 10, 2017. Accessed April 24, 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/04/how-obamas-chemical-weapons-deal-fell-apart/522549/>.

¹²¹ Ibid.

United States failed “not because it didn’t try, but because its moderates were incompetent and unpopular.”¹²² While the United States’ reluctance to provide arms and funding, or to intervene in the conflict may have contributed to the failure of the opposition, the United States was not likely to “buy its way to success” in a fragmented society.¹²³ The moderates could not come up with a cohesive vision for Syria’s future, while “Assad and ISIS both deploy lots of coercion, corruption and clientelism to hold their states together, whether they profess ideologies of secular nationalism or Islamic Caliphalism.”¹²⁴

The election of Donald Trump signaled a change in policy towards the Syrian conflict; however, it is not always clear as to what the United States wants out of the conflict. Early in the Administration, Trump and United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley made it clear that defeating ISIS, not removing Assad was the priority.¹²⁵ After the 4 April 2017 chemical weapons attacks, the Trump Administration made the decision to strike Al Shayrat airfield. This strike along with another statement from Haley indicated that the United States felt that there could not be a political solution in which Assad remains in power.¹²⁶ However, with the constant changes in Trump’s foreign policy, it is unclear what the United States’ goals for Syria actually are.

¹²² John Judis. "America's Failure — and Russia and Iran's Success — in Syria's Cataclysmic Civil War."

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Michelle Nichols. "U.S. priority on Syria no longer focused on 'getting Assad out': Haley." *Reuters*, March 30, 2017. Accessed April 27, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-usa-haley-idUSKBN1712QL>.

¹²⁶ "Nikki Haley: No solution to war with Assad in power." *Al Jazeera English*. April 9, 2017. Accessed April 27, 2017. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/04/nikki-haley-solution-war-assad-power-170409043218584.html>.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia believes that Asad cannot be a part of the solution to the conflict. Saudi Arabia has provided financial support to opposition groups, including those with Islamist leanings, differing from its ally the United States in its support of a democratic transition.¹²⁷ In 2013, Saudi Arabia surpassed Qatar as the main Arab supporter of the opposition because they felt that the opposition could defeat Asad, or that they could pressure the United States to help the opposition do so.¹²⁸ In February 2017, Saudi Arabia announced that it was prepared to send ground troops to Syria to ensure that areas taken from ISIS control would not fall under control of Asad, Iran, or Hezbollah.¹²⁹ Additionally, the Saudi government is hopeful that the Trump Administration will engage more in the conflict. Saudi Arabia expressed frustration with the United States after it did not intervene militarily in 2013 after Asad crossed Obama's "red line."

The Peace Process

A negotiated settlement has not been reached for lack of trying. For much of the civil war, there have been attempts at negotiating a peace deal, however, both the opposition and the government have been convinced that they would win, which

¹²⁷ "Syria crisis: Where key countries stand." BBC News. October 30, 2015. Accessed April 24, 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-23849587>.

¹²⁸ Patrick Cockburn. "Saudi Arabia's dream of becoming the dominant Arab and Muslim power in the world has gone down in flames." The Independent. January 6, 2017. Accessed April 22, 2017. <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/saudi-arabia-syria-yemen-oil-prince-salman-down-in-flames-a7513636.html>.

¹²⁹ "Saudi Arabia 'ready to send ground troops' to Syria." Alaraby. February 21, 2017. Accessed April 22, 2017. <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2017/2/21/saudi-arabia-ready-to-send-ground-troops-to-syria>.

resulted in both sides unwillingness to negotiate.¹³⁰ As discussed in the previous chapter, the opposition is no longer a homogenous group, which makes negotiating with the opposition extremely difficult because it is often that case that many opposition groups are not included in the peace talks. Groups such as Jabhat al-Fatah al-Sham and Daesh are also not included in peace talks as they are deemed terrorist organizations and including them would provide them with a sense of legitimacy many in Syria and the international community are reluctant to give them. Efforts led by well known leaders in the field of conflict resolution, such as Kofi Annan and Staffan de Mistura, have so far resulted in failed or shaky ceasefires that sometimes only hold for a few hours before cities descend into violence again. As of the recent Astana talks, the opposition has expressed that they are not ready to discuss a political solution until security can be maintained with a successful ceasefire.¹³¹ Therefore, it appears the cycle of failed peace talks will continue for the time being.

This section will address the various plans for peace that have been proposed throughout the conflict and will discuss the reasons for the failure each of the major peace talks thus far.

The Arab League's Peace Plan

The Syrian peace process began early in the conflict with the announcement of a peace plan by the Arab League in November 2011. The plan called for the Syrian government to “withdraw the army from cities and towns, release all political prisoners,

¹³⁰Ingrid Habets. "Obstacles to a Syrian Peace: The Interference of Interests." *European View* 15, no. 1 (2016), 79.

¹³¹"Can Astana talks be turning point to end Syria war?" Al Jazeera English. January 23, 2017. Accessed February 11, 2017. <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/insidestory/2017/01/astana-talks-turning-point-syria-war-170123210126611.html>

and permit access to members of the media, human rights groups and Arab monitors.”¹³² The Arab League’s decision to interfere with Syria’s domestic politics marks a change in traditional Arab League policies. According to Article 8 of the Pact of Arab States, the Arab League has maintained the idea that each state should respect the form of government of the other member states and “shall pledge itself not to take any action tending to change that form.”¹³³ However, in response to the Arab Spring uprisings, the Arab League has taken a more active role in domestic politics. The Arab League suspended Syria’s membership in order to pressure the government into ending the violence. The Arab League also imposed economic and political sanctions, however, it did not discuss possible military intervention as it did in the case of intervention in Libya.¹³⁴

In November 2011, the Syrian government announced that it accepted the terms of the Arab League plan. However, the Syrian government quickly failed to abide by the terms of the peace plan, which resulted in the suspension of Syria’s Arab League Membership and economic sanctions.¹³⁵ This behavior by the Syrian government would be repeated throughout the peace process. In December 2011, the Arab League and Syria signed an agreement that would allow observers into the country that would be

¹³²Liz Sly. "Arab League announces peace plan for Syria." *The Washington Post*, November 2, 2011. Accessed February 05, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/arab-league-announces-peace-plan-for-syria/2011/11/02/gIQAKBm6fM_story.html?utm_term=.faf77684ba93.

¹³³ "Pact of the League of Arab States, March 22, 1945." The Avalon Project. 2008. Accessed February 11, 2017. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/arableag.asp.

¹³⁴David Batty and Jack Shenker. "Syria suspended from Arab League." *The Guardian*, November 12, 2011. Accessed March 15, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/nov/12/syria-suspended-arab-league>.

¹³⁵ Marty Haris. "International Responses to the Syrian Uprising: March 2011– June 2012." Parliament of Australia. July 13, 2012. Accessed December 29, 2016. http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BN/2012-2013/SyrianUprising.

under the protection of the government. This deal resulted in some concern that the observers would not be able to freely document the violence due to pressure by the Syrian government.¹³⁶ The observers were withdrawn from the country by January 2012 because the situation in Syria was becoming increasingly unsafe for observers.

Later in January 2012, the Arab League met in Cairo to discuss another plan. The League urged Asad to step down and hand over power to his deputy and hoped to establish a unity government to bring an end to the civil war, which would then be followed by presidential and parliamentary elections.¹³⁷ This, of course, did not happen as Asad was and is unlikely to step down voluntarily. This is why as of 2017, the international community has begun to recognize that unless he is removed by force, Asad will be a part of the peace process, despite the fact that many in Syria have demanded that regime change be a part of Syria's future.

The Annan Plan

The failed Arab League talks were followed by a six-point proposal by the former United Nations Secretary General and the United Nations Special Envoy to Syria, Kofi Annan. Annan's plan (1) highlighted the importance of a Syrian-led peace process, (2) urged warring parties to end the fighting, (3) called for steps to be taken to ensure humanitarian assistance to all affected areas, (4) called for more "arbitrarily detained persons" to be released, (5) ensured the freedom of movement for journalists in the country, and (6) called for the government to "respect freedom of association and

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Yasmine Saleh and Lin Noueihed. "Arab League proposes new plan for Syrian transition." *Reuters*, January 22, 2012. Accessed February 11, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-idUSTRE8041A820120122>.

the right to demonstrate peacefully as legally guaranteed.”¹³⁸ While these six points laid out a more detailed plan than that of the Arab League, like the Arab League plan, the Annan plan would only be successful if all parties worked to implement it. Once again, a shaky ceasefire was implemented that did not last more than a few days. Asad accepted the plan in March 2012, shortly after it was proposed.¹³⁹ Asad’s acceptance of the plan was an important step in the peace process, however, Annan's Six Points were never successfully implemented as Asad did not actually comply with the plan.

Annan resigned from his post as special envoy in August 2012 as a result of the failure of the peace plan. In his resignation speech, he blamed the government, opposition, and international community for the failure:

Yet the bloodshed continues, most of all because of the Syrian government’s intransigence and continuing refusal to implement the six-point plan, and also because of the escalating military campaign of the opposition – all of which is compounded by the disunity of the international community.¹⁴⁰

Annan’s resignation speech accurately sums of the entirety of the peace process from 2011 until 2017. Each party to the conflict is to blame for creating obstacles to a peace agreement and everyone wants to place the blame on each other rather than each party accepting responsibility for creating obstacles. Syria desperately needs the international community to unify in order to place pressure on the warring parties,

¹³⁸ "Six-Point Proposal of the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States." United Nations Documents Centre. April 14, 2012. Accessed February 11, 2017.

http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/documents/six_point_proposal.pdf

¹³⁹"Intra-Syrian talks - Key dates of the peace process." The United Nations Office at Geneva. Accessed February 11, 2017.

[http://www.unog.ch/unog/website/news_media.nsf/\(httpPages\)/E409A03F0D7CFB4AC1257F480045876E?OpenDocument](http://www.unog.ch/unog/website/news_media.nsf/(httpPages)/E409A03F0D7CFB4AC1257F480045876E?OpenDocument).

¹⁴⁰ "Kofi Annan resigns as UN-Arab League Joint Special Envoy for Syrian crisis." UN News Center. August 2, 2012. Accessed February 11, 2017.

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=42609#.WKDQDbYrLEZ>.

however, as Annan pointed out “there continues to be finger-pointing and name-calling in the Security Council”¹⁴¹ This would not be the last time a leader in the international community would place blame on the world powers for failing to resolve Syria’s conflict, but this blame has had little effect on the international community over the course of the conflict.

The Geneva Peace Process

The first round of peace talks in Geneva convened in 2012 and since then there have been two more rounds, with one more taking place in February 2017. The Geneva Process is backed by the United Nations, and has demonstrated the differing ideas the United States and Russia have for the future of Syria. Kofi Annan’s Six Point Plan is often what is known as Geneva I. Geneva II followed the publication of the Geneva Communiqué, which was published in June 2012 and laid out the guidelines for a future political transition. The Geneva II process also failed to produce a peace agreement as negotiations took place 18 months after the Geneva Communiqué was agreed upon. This period allowed for the “continuation of international policies to either arm disparate insurgent forces or back the Assad government at all costs, which precluded the diplomacy needed to shore up regional and global agreement for a transition.”¹⁴² This worked to encourage groups to keep fighting in order to reach a military solution, rather than to work out a much-needed political solution. Additionally, Geneva II failed

¹⁴¹Barbara Plett. "Syria crisis: Kofi Annan quits as UN-Arab League envoy." BBC News. August 2, 2012. Accessed February 11, 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-19099676>.

¹⁴² Leila Hilal. "The United Nations and a peace process strategy for Syria." Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre. November 2014. Accessed March 15, 2017, 2. http://noref.no/var/ezflow_site/storage/original/application/0066b428a6a1429bf47fe517625af311.pdf.

because of the competing goals of the United States and Russia.¹⁴³ This demonstrates that international cooperation is a key element to the success of the peace process despite the fact that any solution should be a Syrian-led initiative.

Geneva III was set to begin in February 2016, however, after a few days the talks were suspended because the United Nations said the countries backing the different actors in the conflict were doing more to fuel the conflict than to work towards ending it, as they have done for much of the conflict.¹⁴⁴ At Geneva III, de Mistura met separately with government representatives and opposition representatives and there was no plan for the two sides to meet.¹⁴⁵ Due to the fact that the opposition and government had no plans to meet during Geneva III, it was unlikely from the start of the talks that any significant progress would be made.

The 2017 Astana Talks

The most recent peace talks that were not a part of the Geneva Process, took place in Astana, Kazakhstan on 23-24 January 2017 following the fall of Aleppo and an apparent military victory by the Syrian government. These talks do not necessarily replace the Geneva process, but there is a possibility that they could. However, there is some concern that these talks may have a pro-government leaning as the states leading the talks are primarily backing the government. The talks were “the first face-to-face meeting between Syrian rebel fighters and government officials in nearly six years of civil war,” which seemed to cause some to hope that the Astana process could produce a

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Nick Cumming-Bruce and Somni Sengupta. "Syria Talks Are Suspended." *The New York Times*, February 3, 2016. Accessed February 11, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/04/world/middleeast/syria-peace-talks-geneva-de-mistura.html>.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

solution.¹⁴⁶ However, like the Geneva Process, the talks resulted in quarrelling between the two sides.¹⁴⁷ This means the Astana Process and Geneva Process are likely to continue simultaneously.

The Astana talks, like those that preceded them, emphasized the need to respect Syria's sovereignty. The joint statement by Russia, Iran, and Turkey states:

*Reaffirm their commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, non-sectarian and democratic State, as confirmed by the UN Security Council*¹⁴⁸

This sentiment has been repeated in many of the United Nations Resolutions that have resulted from the ongoing peace talks, including Geneva. Throughout the last six years of conflict, Assad has expressed his desire to retake the entirety of Syria “without hesitation.”¹⁴⁹ The emphasis on state unity may be in efforts to eliminate further regional destabilization.

Everyday Syrians have expressed frustration with the recent peace talks in Astana. Many feel that it has become a Turkish-Russian matter and that there are too many factions within the opposition and the lack of unity means peace talks will not be successful.¹⁵⁰ However, Syrian scholar Marwan Kabalan has said that these talks may be the most serious efforts at reaching a peace agreement for several reasons: (1) the

¹⁴⁶ Anne Barnard and Hwaida Saad. "First Day of Syria Peace Talks Quickly Descends Into Quarreling." *The New York Times*, January 23, 2017. Accessed February 11, 2017.

https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/23/world/middleeast/syria-astana-talks-russia-turkey.html?_r=0.

¹⁴⁷ "Syrian rebel groups refuse face-to-face meeting at Astana peace talks." *France 24*. January 23, 2017. Accessed February 11, 2017. <http://www.france24.com/en/20170123-syria-rebel-groups-refuse-face-face-meeting-astana-peace-talks>.

¹⁴⁸ "Astana joint statement by Iran, Russia, Turkey: in full." *Al Jazeera English*. January 24, 2017. Accessed January 24, 2017. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/01/astana-joint-statement-iran-russia-turkey-full-170124133951063.html>.

¹⁴⁹ "Assad vows to retake all of Syria 'without hesitation'" *Al Jazeera English*. *Al Jazeera*, 12 Feb. 2016. Web. 12 Apr. 2017.

¹⁵⁰ "Can Astana talks be turning point to end Syria war?" *Al Jazeera English*.

United States are not involved in these talks, so the rivalry between Russia and the United States cannot hamper efforts, and (2) The major international actors (Iran, Turkey, and Russia) seem to agree, so perhaps the ongoing proxy war is coming to an end.¹⁵¹ These factors mostly benefit the Syrian government, rather than the opposition, but demonstrate it may be challenging to have a peace process that does not lean towards one side or another. While this appears to instill a sense of hope that the conflict will end soon through negotiated settlement, this is still an unlikely possibility as long as the opposition remains fragmented and international actors are intervening.

The Astana talks resumed in March 2017, “without any substantive negotiations taking place” because opposition leaders boycotted the meetings because Russia had failed to uphold a ceasefire agreed to in December 2016.¹⁵² It is likely that opposition groups will also refuse to attend future Astana talks if a stable ceasefire is not put into place. There were rumors that a new constitution was discussed at the second round of Astana talks, but the Syrian government says these claims are false.¹⁵³

Geneva IV

After the first round of the Astana Peace Talks, another round of talks in Geneva resumed in February 2017. United Nations Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura offered a pessimistic outlook on the talks, stating that while he was not expecting a breakthrough,

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² "Syria peace talks in Astana close with no sign of rebels." Reuters. March 15, 2017. Accessed March 15, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-astana-idUSKBN16M0M8>.

¹⁵³ "Syrian regime says constitution not discussed in Astana." *Hürriyet Daily News*. February 16, 2017. Accessed March 15, 2017. <http://www.hurriyetaailynews.com/syrian-regime-says-constitution-not-discussed-in-astana.aspx?pageID=238&nID=109853&NewsCatID=359>.

he expected the talks to provide momentum.¹⁵⁴ This sentiment echoes many of the previous attitudes towards peace talks; that they will not end the conflict, but will hopefully provide the momentum to do so. This way of thinking created a cycle in which little has been achieved. De Mistura also felt that the opposition and government shared “little common ground,” making it challenging to reach any kind of compromise.¹⁵⁵ The United Nations said that the Geneva IV talks will focus on the following:

the establishment of a credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance; a process for drafting a new constitution; and free and fair elections to be held under U.N. supervision.¹⁵⁶

These goals do not explicitly state maintaining Syrian sovereignty; however, it does indicate that the United Nations foresees that Syria will remain a state by hoping to establish stable governance through a new constitution and free and fair elections.

The most recent round of talks in Geneva has been about as productive as the previous three. The government and the opposition are still reluctant to make compromises. The Asad government wants to primarily discuss fighting terrorism, while the opposition continues to push for discussions on a political transition, something that Asad is unlikely to agree to, at least in the near future.¹⁵⁷ Additionally, De Mistura decided to convene this round in order to discuss UN Security Council

¹⁵⁴George Baghdadi. "What to expect as Syria peace talks resume." CBS News. February 23, 2017. Accessed March 1, 2017. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/syria-peace-talks-geneva-4-assad-rebels-opposition-little-hope-breakthrough/>.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Jamie Dettmer. "Why No Geneva Breakthrough in Syrian Peace Talks." Voice of America. February 28, 2017. Accessed March 1, 2017. <http://www.voanews.com/a/why-no-geneva-breakthrough-in-syrian-peace-talks/3743778.html>.

Resolution 2254.¹⁵⁸ UN Resolution 2254 was adopted on 18 December 2015 and focuses on issues of governance, the ongoing humanitarian crisis, and describes that the only way to achieve peace is through “an inclusive and Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.”¹⁵⁹ Additionally, the resolution begins by reaffirming a commitment to Syrian unity, thus emphasizing that partition is an option the Security Council is unlikely to pursue.¹⁶⁰ However, like Geneva II, this may result in failure as it has been almost two years since the resolution was adopted.

Future Peace Talks

March 2017 will mark the sixth anniversary of the Syrian conflict with still no political solution in sight as negotiators keep encountering obstacles as both sides refuse to meet or make compromises. De Mistura has called for the peace process to speed up, but, as long as the parties continue to approach negotiations in the same ways as they have done in the past it is unlikely that they will speed up or yield any positive results in the near future.¹⁶¹ Russia, Turkey, and Iran--the sponsors of the Astana talks--have agreed to meet again on 3-4 May 2017. The Astana talks appear to be an unlikely candidate to produce a solution that will appease the government and opposition groups, since they are sponsored by two (possibly three with Turkey's recent shift in policy) pro-Asad states. However, Great Britain's special representative for Syria, Gareth Bayley, has said that if the Astana talks can produce a lasting ceasefire, it could replace

¹⁵⁸ Dylan Collins. "Geneva 4 and the shifting shape of Syria diplomacy." *Al Jazeera*, March 11, 2017. Accessed March 15, 2017. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/03/geneva-4-shifting-shape-syria-diplomacy-170311081959353.html>.

¹⁵⁹ United Nations Security Council resolution 2254, S/RES/2254 (18 December 2015), available from http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2254.pdf

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ "Syria peace talks in Astana close with no sign of rebels." *Reuters*, March 15, 2017. Accessed March 15, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-astana-idUSKBN16M0M8>.

the Geneva process in the future. However, a stable ceasefire is only a short-term solution, and the Astana talks may not produce an outcome that works for both the government and opposition.

Conclusion

International support has greatly weakened the unity of the opposition. In the beginning of the conflict, many deemed it necessary because many opposition groups lacked the funding, legitimacy, and experience in creating political institutions that they need to be successful.¹⁶² However, international involvement also strengthened the Asad government and has worked to extend the length of the conflict. This fits in the framework established by existing civil war literature that says international involvement prolongs civil wars and that international actors act as spoilers to the peace process.

¹⁶² Ufuk Ulutas. "The Syrian Political Opposition: What Went Wrong?" 36.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Conclusions

One of the biggest uncertainties about the conflict is how and when it will end. Civil wars in the Middle East “have consistently behaved much like other civil wars across the globe over the past century,” therefore civil war literature can explain what we can expect from the Syrian conflict.¹⁶³ Pollack and Walter state that there are two paths “to bring an early and permanent end to civil wars:” negotiated settlement and decisive military victory.¹⁶⁴ The following chapter will analyze these potential civil war outcomes in the context of the Syrian conflict and what their effects on the post-conflict Syrian state and society will be. While these two paths are for an early end to civil wars, civil war literature and the events of the conflict thus far indicate that there will not be an early end to the conflict. However, negotiated settlement and military victory are still the two most likely outcomes of the Syrian conflict. It is unlikely that there will be a permanent end to the conflict in the near future. This analysis will indicate what the international community can expect from the Syrian conflict and that the outcome may not match the desired outcome for much of the international community. It is possible that the conflict, at least at this point (April 2017), will end in a decisive Asad military victory, followed by a violent period as Asad attempts to regain control over the whole country and suppress any uprising or opposition. Thus, the world should be prepared for any possible outcome.

¹⁶³ Kenneth M. Pollack, and Barbara F. Walter. "Escaping the Civil War Trap in the Middle East.", 30.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 33.

Two Paths to Ending the Conflict

Negotiated Settlement

For many, negotiated settlement is the ideal solution to the Syrian conflict because it “(a) stops the fighting, reducing the threat of spillover and contagion, (b) avoids post victory reprisals, and (c) prevents one’s enemy from gaining full control over the government.”¹⁶⁵ However, it is also the most unlikely outcome as six years of negotiations have yielded little progress and are currently in a stalemate. This is due to the fact that in civil wars “the government usually holds a disproportionate share of the bargaining leverage” and “since most governments have a standing army, they are better equipped to impose their most preferred outcome through the use of force.”¹⁶⁶ Additionally, the Syria case fails to meet the three conditions that make negotiated settlement possible.¹⁶⁷

As the events of the peace process indicate, negotiated settlement is highly unlikely as the major domestic actors have refused to meet with each other over the last round of peace talks. Former President Jimmy Carter argues that negotiated settlement is not a possibility at all until all sides put a stop to the violence and that this should be the common goal for all sides.¹⁶⁸ Carter also argues that the international actors involved must work to negotiate.¹⁶⁹ Under the current United States Administration, this appeared to be a possibility until relations between Russia and the United States were

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 34.

¹⁶⁶ Katherine Sawyer Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, and William Reed. “The Role of External Support in Civil War Termination,” 5.

¹⁶⁷ Kenneth M. Pollack, and Barbara F. Walter. “Escaping the Civil War Trap in the Middle East.”, 34.

¹⁶⁸ Jimmy Carter. “A First Step for Syria? Stop the Killing.” *The New York Times*, September 20, 2016. Accessed March 15, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/21/opinion/jimmy-carter-a-first-step-for-syria-stop-the-killing.html?_r=0.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

strained when the Trump Administration reacted to the 4 April 2017 chemical weapons attack by bombing a Syrian airbase. However, even if the United States and Russia work together in the negotiation process, Russia is unlikely to support regime change since keeping Asad in power is their primary goal. In addition to the failure of the peace process, many actors, especially those who support the opposition, have shifted their focus from removing Asad to defeating ISIS. This has allowed Asad and the Syrian government to continue to wage war against the opposition and civilians without any international power or unified force to challenge him.

Barbara Walter's research on civil wars indicates that this is typical of civil wars. She found that "between 1940 and 1900 enemies in civil wars almost always failed to reach successful negotiated solutions to their conflicts unless an outside power guaranteed the safety of the belligerents during the ensuing transition period."¹⁷⁰ So far, none of the states supporting the opposition have pledged to protect them in a transition period, and if Asad is part of the solution the opposition is likely to face continued violence.

Decisive Military Victory

Despite the fact that in 2016 it looked as if an Asad victory was highly unlikely, as of April 2017, it appears that decisive military victory is the most likely outcome for the conflict. The aid of Russia, Iran, and Shia militias such as Hezbollah, gave Asad the upper hand militarily in the conflict and overall international involvement fueled the continuation of the conflict and created a divided and weak opposition. The opposition is too disorganized to rally together to remove Asad or to pressure the government for a

¹⁷⁰ Walter, Barbara F. "The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement.", 360.

negotiated settlement. Thus, since Asad is winning, he has no incentive to even attempt to negotiate with the opposition, meaning that it is likely that he will continue to wage war until he has retaken territory in the west from the opposition.

While Asad's behavior and his place in a post-conflict Syrian state has been deemed unacceptable by the international community, the international community should not discount the possibility that Asad may win and retain power. Thus, the international community must be prepared that this a potential outcome to the conflict. An Asad victory does not necessarily indicate the end of the conflict. A decisive military victory for Asad means that he is likely to remain in power until his death like his father. This will not come peacefully; Asad is likely to do everything in his power to ensure that another Arab Spring uprising does not occur and will punish those who supported the opposition. Middle Eastern expert Maysam Behravesch explained what to expect from post-conflict Syria if Asad wins:

Even if Assad wins the war, he will lose the peace afterwards. He will have to deal with emerging pockets of rebellion and resistance. This is to say that either the Syrian civil war could persist unabated for years to come, wreaking havoc in its wake, as it has so far. Or it will break down into a series of destabilizing yet resilient insurgencies, similar to what we saw in post-invasion Iraq, where the outcome was nothing but insecurity and terrorism. The fact of the matter, however, is that under the existing circumstances, Syria without Assad, whether it be it through his personal resignation or negotiations for political transition, elections or referendum, is far from realistic and plausible. In a nutshell, I don't see a bright future for Syria.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Maysam Behravesch. "Interview: 'If Assad wins the war, he will lose the peace afterwards'" Accessed April 25, 2017. <http://www.dw.com/en/interview-if-assad-wins-the-war-he-will-lose-the-peace-afterwards/a-36863262>.

UN Special Envoy Stefan de Mistura stated in late 2016 that low-intensity conflict is likely to continue in the event of an Asad victory.¹⁷² Using Iraq as a model for Syria, he also argued that more people would join ISIS, as a violent, military victory would not win people over and that the only way to prevent this is to have a political solution with those who feel disenfranchised by the Asad government.¹⁷³ However, in the event of an Asad victory, it is unlikely that he will try to work with those who feel disenfranchised. It is likely that ISIS will then become what Stanislawski calls and “almost-state” as Asad only needs to contain ISIS and not totally defeat it.¹⁷⁴ Therefore, Asad only needs to win the war in the west to have a decisive military victory. The Syrian government’s war against ISIS in the east may continue, or he will simply try to contain them to a manageable area. It will be extremely challenging for Asad to defeat ISIS as Iraq is still extremely unstable and the Iraqi government is still working to liberate cities from the organization.

Pollack and Walter’s research on civil wars indicates that while decisive military victory is the fastest way to end a war, it is not necessarily the best as it comes “at the price of horrific (even genocidal) levels of violence against the defeated, including their civilian populations.”¹⁷⁵ The Syria case fits this understanding of civil wars as can be seen in the events in the battle for Aleppo in 2016 that shifted the outcome of the civil war in Asad’s favor.

¹⁷²Patrick Wintour. "UN Syria envoy warns of terror risk if Assad wins total military victory." *The Guardian*, November 15, 2016. Accessed April 25, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/15/staffan-de-mistura-un-special-envoy-syria-terror-risk-assad-total-military-victory>.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴Noah Feldman. "If Assad Wins, Islamic State Wins." Bloomberg.com. February 10, 2016. Accessed April 25, 2017. <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2016-02-10/if-assad-wins-islamic-state-wins>.

¹⁷⁵ Kenneth M. Pollack, and Barbara F. Walter. "Escaping the Civil War Trap in the Middle East.", 33.

Will the conflict end soon?

Pollack and Walter explain that the Syrian conflict has been especially difficult to end because “(1) the incumbent regime is deeply unpopular and represents only a minority of the population, (2) the opposition is heavily factionalized, and (3) Syria has no history of ethnic/sectarian compromise.”¹⁷⁶ These factors paired with international support for opposition groups and the government has caused the civil war to last longer.

Conclusions: What can we expect from a post-conflict Syria?

Lessons from previous civil wars and scholarship on civil wars indicates that the Syrian conflict is likely to end in an Asad military victory, however, this will not necessarily be in the next year or near future. This will be followed by a period of continued instability in the country as frustrated Sunnis flock to join ISIS and the Asad government crushes any uprisings or opposition. The state will also go through the difficult process of reconstruction, which is a process that is likely to be prolonged due to continued instability.

If Asad wins, it is likely that he and those in his military and government who have perpetrated war crimes against innocent civilians will not be brought to trial in an international court. The victims of chemical weapons attacks, barrel bombs, and torture by the *mukhabarat* will most likely not receive some solace in the fact that perpetrators of these crimes will be brought to justice.

Syria will also be faced with the challenge of post-conflict reconstruction. This will be a challenging process under an Asad victory as it will likely be unsafe for aid

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 38.

workers to enter the country as ISIS continues to exist, other organizations commit terrorist attacks, and the government works to consolidate power. Infrastructure has crumbled because of the conflict--many areas need access to power, clean water, and food, among other things. Reconstruction will be extremely costly and require the support of the international community and organizations such as the World Bank. Additionally, the international community must also be prepared to continue to deal with the Syrian refugee crisis as refugees are unlikely to be willing to return to Syria and more refugees will flood Turkey, Europe, and other parts of the world. This will require countries to begin to integrate refugees into their economies and to contribute to the UNHCR and other aid organizations.

Therefore, it is unlikely that Syria will see peace immediately after the end of the conflict. The international community must acknowledge that negotiated settlement may not be a reality and be prepared for an Asad victory and an extremely violent post-conflict Syrian state. While this analysis predicts a bleak outcome for the post-conflict Syrian state, Syria's case could provide important lessons for future conflicts of this nature.

Bibliography

Allsopp, Harriet. *The Kurds of Syria: Political Parties and Identity in the Middle East*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2014.

Arfi, Badredine. "State Collapse in a New Theoretical Framework: The Case of Yugoslavia." *International Journal of Sociology* 28, no. 3 (1998): 15-42.

"Assad vows to retake all of Syria 'without hesitation'" *Al Jazeera English*. Al Jazeera, February 12, 2016. Accessed April 12, 2017. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/02/assad-vows-retake-syria-hesitation-160212141345408.html>.

"Astana joint statement by Iran, Russia, Turkey: in full." *Al Jazeera English*. January 24, 2017. Accessed January 24, 2017. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/01/astana-joint-statement-iran-russia-turkey-full-170124133951063.html>.

Ayoob, Mohammed. "The Arab Spring: Its Geostrategic Significance." *Middle East Policy* 19, no. 3 (2012): 84-97.

Baghdadi, George Baghdadi. "What to expect as Syria peace talks resume." CBS News. February 23, 2017. Accessed March 1, 2017. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/syria-peace-talks-geneva-4-assad-rebels-opposition-little-hope-breakthrough/>.

Batatu, Hanna. *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Batty, David and Jack Shenker. "Syria suspended from Arab League." *The Guardian*, November 12, 2011. Accessed March 15, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/nov/12/syria-suspended-arab-league>.

Barnard, Anne. "Gas Attack Is Said to Kill Dozens in Syria." *The New York Times*, April 4, 2017. Accessed April 4, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/04/world/middleeast/syria-gas-attack.html?_r=0.

Barnard, Anne and Hwaida Saad. "First Day of Syria Peace Talks Quickly Descends Into Quarreling." *The New York Times*, January 23, 2017. Accessed February 11, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/23/world/middleeast/syria-astana-talks-russia-turkey.html?_r=0.

Behraves, Maysam. "Interview: 'If Assad wins the war, he will lose the peace afterwards'" Accessed April 25, 2017. <http://www.dw.com/en/interview-if-assad-wins-the-war-he-will-lose-the-peace-afterwards/a-36863262>.

Bøås, Morten, and Kathleen M. Jennings. "'Failed states' and 'state failure': Threats or opportunities?." *Globalizations* 4, no. 4 (2007): 475-485.

Byman, Daniel. "Why are Syria and Iran such tight allies?" *Slate Magazine*. July 19, 2006. Accessed May 10, 2017.
http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/foreigners/2006/07/strange_bedfellows.html.

"Can Astana talks be turning point to end Syria war?" *Al Jazeera English*, January 23, 2017. Accessed February 11, 2017.
<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/insidestory/2017/01/astana-talks-turning-point-syria-war-170123210126611.html>.

Carter, Jimmy. "A First Step for Syria? Stop the Killing." *The New York Times*. September 20, 2016. Accessed March 15, 2017.
https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/21/opinion/jimmy-carter-a-first-step-for-syria-stop-the-killing.html?_r=0.

Chance, Matthew. "Syria: 5 things Russia wants in war." *CNN*, February 8, 2016. Accessed April 22, 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2016/02/08/middleeast/syria-aleppo-russia-strategy/>.

Chulov, Martin. "Al-Nusra Front cuts ties with al-Qaida and renames itself." *The Guardian*, July 28, 2016. Accessed December 26, 2016.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/28/al-qaida-syria-nusra-split-terror-network>.

Cockburn, Patrick. "Saudi Arabia's dream of becoming the dominant Arab and Muslim power in the world has gone down in flames." *The Independent*. January 6, 2017. Accessed April 22, 2017. <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/saudi-arabia-syria-yemen-oil-prince-salman-down-in-flames-a7513636.html>.

Coggins, Bridget L. "Does State Failure Cause Terrorism? An Empirical Analysis (1999–2008)." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 3 (2015): 455-83.

Collins, Dylan. "Geneva 4 and the shifting shape of Syria diplomacy." *Al Jazeera*, March 11, 2017. Accessed March 15, 2017.
<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/03/geneva-4-shifting-shape-syria-diplomacy-170311081959353.html>.

Cumming-Bruce, Nick and Somni Sengupta. "Syria Talks Are Suspended." *The New York Times*, February 3, 2016. Accessed February 11, 2017.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/04/world/middleeast/syria-peace-talks-geneva-demistura.html>.

"Declaration by the National Coalition For Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces." Syrian National Coalition Of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces. Accessed December 26, 2016. <http://en.etilaf.org/coalition-documents/declaration-by-the-national-coalition-for-syrian-revolutionary-and-opposition-forces.html>.

Dettmer, Jamie. "Why No Geneva Breakthrough in Syrian Peace Talks." *Voice of America*. February 28, 2017. Accessed March 1, 2017.
<http://www.voanews.com/a/why-no-geneva-breakthrough-in-syrian-peace-talks/3743778.html>.

Elrich, Reese and Noam Chomsky. *Inside Syria: The Backstory of Their Civil War and What the World Can Expect*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2014.

Englehart, Neil A. "State Capacity, State Failure, and Human Rights." *Journal of Peace Research* 46, no. 2 (2009): 163-80.

Fearon, James D., and David D. Laitin. "Civil war termination." In *Conference paper*. 2007.

Fearon, James D., and David D. Laitin. "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War." *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (2003): 75-90.

Feldman, Noah. "If Assad Wins, Islamic State Wins." *Bloomberg.com*. February 10, 2016. Accessed April 25, 2017. <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2016-02-10/if-assad-wins-islamic-state-wins>.

Fisher, Max. "Political science says Syria's civil war will probably last at least another decade." *The Washington Post*. October 23, 2013. Accessed May 9, 2017.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/10/23/political-science-says-syrias-civil-war-will-probably-last-at-least-another-decade/?utm_term=.0a8484bf7bea.

Friedman, Thomas L. *From Beirut to Jerusalem : Updated with a New Chapter*. New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1995.

Fulton, Will, Joseph Holliday, and Sam Wyer. "Iranian Strategy in Syria." Institute for the Study of War. 2013. Accessed April 22, 2017.
<http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/IranianStrategyinSyria-1MAY.pdf>.

Glass, Charles. *Syria burning: A Short History of a Catastrophe*. London: Verso, 2016.

"Guide to the Syrian opposition." *BBC News*. October 17, 2013. Accessed May 9, 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-15798218>.

Gunter, Michael. "Unrecognized De Facto States in World Politics: The Kurds." *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 20, no. 2 (2014): 161-78.

Habets, Ingrid. "Obstacles to a Syrian Peace: The Interference of Interests." *European View* 15, no. 1 (2016): 77-85.

Hashim, Ahmed S. "The Islamic State: From al-Qaeda Affiliate to Caliphate." *Middle East Policy* 4, no. 21 (2014): 69-83.

Haris, Marty. "International Responses to the Syrian Uprising: March 2011– June 2012." Parliament of Australia. July 13, 2012. Accessed December 29, 2016. http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BN/2012-2013/SyrianUprising.

Hilal, Leila. "The United Nations and a peace process strategy for Syria." Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre. November 2014. Accessed March 15, 2017, 2. http://noref.no/var/ezflow_site/storage/original/application/0066b428a6a1429bf47fe517625af311.pdf.

Horn, Heather. "To Know a Tyrant: Inside Bashar al-Assad's Transformation From 'Reformer' to Killer." *The Atlantic*, September 18, 2012. Accessed April 13, 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/09/to-know-a-tyrant-inside-bashar-al-assads-transformation-from-reformer-to-killer/262486/>.

"Intra-Syrian talks - Key dates of the peace process." The United Nations Office at Geneva. Accessed February 11, 2017. [http://www.unog.ch/unog/website/news_media.nsf/\(httpPages\)/E409A03F0D7CFB4AC1257F480045876E?OpenDocument](http://www.unog.ch/unog/website/news_media.nsf/(httpPages)/E409A03F0D7CFB4AC1257F480045876E?OpenDocument).

Jackson, Robert H. *Quasi-states: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World*. New York City: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Jones, Dorian. "Russia Deals Major Blow to Turkey's Syria Policy." Voice of America. March 22, 2017. Accessed April 22, 2017. <http://www.voanews.com/a/russia-turkey-syria-kurds/3777443.html>.

Judis, John. "America's Failure — and Russia and Iran's Success — in Syria's Cataclysmic Civil War." TPM. January 10, 2017. Accessed April 17, 2017. <http://talkingpointsmemo.com/cafe/americas-failure-russia-success-in-syrias-war>.

"Kofi Annan resigns as UN-Arab League Joint Special Envoy for Syrian crisis." UN News Center. August 2, 2012. Accessed February 11, 2017. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=42609#.WKDQDbYrLEZ>.

Landis, Joshua. "The Syrian Uprising of 2011: Why the Asad Regime Is Likely to Survive to 2013." *Middle East Policy* 19, no. 1 (2012): 72-84.

Kessler, Glenn. "President Obama and the 'red line' on Syria's chemical weapons." *The Washington Post*, September 6, 2013. Accessed December 29, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2013/09/06/president-obama-and-the-red-line-on-syrias-chemical-weapons/?utm_term=.f380a551e68d.

Lesch, David W. *The New Lion of Damascus: Bashar al-Asad and modern Syria*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

Lund, Aron. "The Free Syrian Army Doesn't Exist." *Syria Comment*, March 17, 2013. Accessed April 4, 2017. <http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/the-free-syrian-army-doesnt-exist/>.

Lund, Aron. "Origins of the Syrian Democratic Forces: A Primer." *Syria Deeply*, January 22, 2016. Accessed April 13, 2017. <https://www.newsdeeply.com/syria/articles/2016/01/22/origins-of-the-syrian-democratic-forces-a-primer>.

Mantzikos, Ioannis. "Somalia and Yemen: The Links between Terrorism and State Failure." *Digest of Middle East Studies* 20, no. 2 (2011): 242-60.

"Massive bombardment target a hospital and kills 58 including 11 children in Khan Shekhon." Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. April 4, 2017. Accessed April 4, 2017. <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=64104>.

McEvers, Kelly. "Revisiting The Spark That Kindled The Syrian Uprising." *NPR*, March 16, 2012. July 22, 2016. <http://www.npr.org/2012/03/16/148719850/revisiting-the-spark-that-kindled-the-syrian-uprising>.

McHugo, John. *Syria: A Recent History*. London: Saqi Books, 2015. Nook eBook.

Melhem, Hisham Melhem. "How Obama's Syrian Chemical Weapons Deal Fell Apart." *The Atlantic*, April 10, 2017. Accessed April 24, 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/04/how-obamas-chemical-weapons-deal-fell-apart/522549/>.

"Mission Statement and Goals." Syrian National Coalition Of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces. Accessed December 26, 2016. <http://en.etilaf.org/about-us/goals.html>.

Montgomery, Katarina. "Understanding the Drivers of Radicalization in Syria." *Syria Deeply*. April 22, 2016. Accessed May 9, 2017. <https://www.newsdeeply.com/syria/articles/2014/12/11/understanding-the-drivers-of-radicalization-in-syria>.

Moubayed, Sami M. *Under The Black Flag: At the Frontier of the New Jihad*. New York: I.B. Tauris&Co., 2015.

Muir, Jim. "Bashar Al-Assad's Tightening Grip on Syria 10 Years on." BBC News. July 17, 2010. Accessed August 1, 2016. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-10674093>;

Nichols, Michelle. "U.S. priority on Syria no longer focused on 'getting Assad out': Haley." Reuters. March 30, 2017. Accessed April 27, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-usa-haley-idUSKBN1712QL>.

"Nikki Haley: No solution to war with Assad in power." Al Jazeera English. April 9, 2017. Accessed April 27, 2017. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/04/nikki-haley-solution-war-assad-power-170409043218584.html>.

Obama, Barack and Fredrik Reinfeldt. "Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Reinfeldt of Sweden in Joint Press Conference." The White House. September 04, 2013. Accessed December 29, 2016. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/04/remarks-president-obama-and-prime-minister-reinfeldt-sweden-joint-press->.

"Pact of the League of Arab States, March 22, 1945." The Avalon Project. 2008. Accessed February 11, 2017. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/arableag.asp.

Peach, Kaitlin. "Sootoro (Report for the Carter Center Palantir Database)." 22 July 2016.

Plett, Barbara. "Syria crisis: Kofi Annan quits as UN-Arab League envoy." BBC News. August 2, 2012. Accessed February 11, 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-19099676>.

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

Power, Samantha. "Remarks at a UN Security Council Emergency Briefing on Syria" United States Mission to the United Nations. December 13, 2016. Accessed December 26, 2016. <https://usun.state.gov/remarks/7607>.

Saleh, Yasmine and Lin Noueihed. "Arab League proposes new plan for Syrian transition." *Reuters*, January 22, 2012. Accessed February 11, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-idUSTRE8041A820120122>.

"Saudi Arabia 'ready to send ground troops' to Syria." Alaraby. February 21, 2017. Accessed April 22, 2017. <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2017/2/21/saudi-arabia-ready-to-send-ground-troops-to-syria>.

Sawyer, Katherine, Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, and William Reed. "The Role of External Support in Civil War Termination." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2015): 1-29.

Seale, Patrick. *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

Sheppard, Si. "What the Syrian Kurds Have Wrought." *The Atlantic*, October 25, 2016. Accessed January 4, 2017. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/10/kurds-rojava-syria-isis-iraq-assad/505037/>.

"Six-Point Proposal of the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States." United Nations Documents Centre. April 14, 2012. Accessed February 11, 2017. http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/documents/six_point_proposal.pdf

Sly, Liz. "Arab League announces peace plan for Syria." *The Washington Post*, November 2, 2011. Accessed February 05, 2017.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/arab-league-announces-peace-plan-for-syria/2011/11/02/gIQAKBm6fM_story.html?utm_term=.faf77684ba93.

Stanislawski, Bartosz H. "Para-States, Quasi-States, and Black Spots: Perhaps Not States, But Not "Ungoverned Territories," Either." *International Studies Review* 10, no. 2 (2008): 366-96.

Starr, Stephen. *Revolt in Syria: Eye-witness to the Uprising*. 2nd ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

Stedman, Stephen John. "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes. (problems in Peacemaking)." *International Security* 22, no. 2 (1997): 5-53.

Sullivan, Marisa. "Hezbollah in Syria." Institute for the Study of War. April 2014. Accessed April 22, 2017.

http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Hezbollah_Sullivan_FINAL.pdf

Syria conflict: Ceasefire agreed, backed by Russia and Turkey." *BBC News*, December 29, 2016. Accessed December 29, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-38460127>.

"Syria crisis: Where key countries stand." *BBC News*. October 30, 2015. Accessed April 24, 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-23849587>.

"Syrian Kurdistan drops Rojava word in its draft constitution." *Rudaw*. December 29, 2016. Accessed January 4, 2017. <http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/28122016>.

"Syrian rebel groups refuse face-to-face meeting at Astana peace talks." *France 24*. January 23, 2017. Accessed February 11, 2017. <http://www.france24.com/en/20170123-syria-rebel-groups-refuse-face-face-meeting-astana-peace-talks>.

"Syrian regime says constitution not discussed in Astana." *Hürriyet Daily News*. February 16, 2017. Accessed March 15, 2017. <http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/syrian-regime-says-constitution-not-discussed-in-astana.aspx?pageID=238&nID=109853&NewsCatID=359>.

"Syria peace talks in Astana close with no sign of rebels." *Reuters*, March 15, 2017. Accessed March 15, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-astana-idUSKBN16M0M8>.

"Syria's Alawites, a secretive and persecuted sect." *Reuters*, 2 February 2012. Accessed 12 April 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-alawites-sect-idUSTRE8110Q720120202>.

"The Syrian National Council." *Carnegie Middle East Center*. September 25, 2013. Accessed May 10, 2017. <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/48334?lang=en>.

"Turkey warns Syria talks at risk over truce violations." *Jordan Times*, January 4, 2017. Accessed January 4, 2017. <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/region/turkey-warns-syria-talks-risk-over-truce-violations>.

Ulutas, Ufuk. "The Syrian Political Opposition: What Went Wrong?" *Insight Turkey* 18, no. 2 (2016): 31-39.

United Nations Security Council resolution 2254, S/RES/2254 (18 December 2015), available from http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2254.pdf.

Walter, Barbara F. "The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement." *International Organization* 51, no. 3 (1997): 335-64.

Weber, Max. "Politics as a Vocation." (1968).

"Why Russia is an ally of Assad." *The Economist*, September 30, 2015. Accessed April 22, 2017. <http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2015/09/economist-explains-22?fsrc=scn%2Ffb%2Fte%2Fbl%2Fed%2Fwhyrussiaisanallyofassad>.

Wintour, Patrick. "UN Syria envoy warns of terror risk if Assad wins total military victory." *The Guardian*, November 15, 2016. Accessed April 25, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/15/staffan-de-mistura-un-special-envoy-syria-terror-risk-assad-total-military-victory>.

Wolff, Stefan. "The regional dimensions of state failure." *Review of International Studies* 37, no. 03 (2011): 951-972.