The Rising Tide of Syria

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Abstract

There is no doubt the current conflict in Syria has reached its tipping point. As hundreds of people die each week, the conflict continues to push the limits of the international community's ability to foster a successful resolution to end the suffering. In order to fully comprehend the chaotic nature of the conflict, one must first examine how the conflict reached its current intractable state, and what factors are stimulating the violence. Long standing political and social grievances by the numerous sectarian groups is not only prolonging the conflict but helping promote a cycle of violence that transcends years of intangible issues such as pride, identity and security. This paper addresses the sectarian cleavages that exist within the country and why these interactions are helping prolong the violence and becoming a barrier to de-escalation. The paper also examines the formulation and structure of both the rebel movement and the government forces. It addresses how the rebel movement is responding to harsh government repression by devolving into a religiously motivated struggle, prompted by foreign jihadist influence. Lastly this paper focuses on the regional implications of the conflict and what policy options may be available to the United States to help curtail the violence.

Key Words: Syria, Alawite, Sunni, Shia, Sectarian, Salafist, Jihadist, Civil War, Insurgency, Free Syrian Army, Al-Qaeda

Introduction

In 1927, Ali Sulayman was approached by four main families—each lording over a *bayt* (house)—in the Mountain town of Qurdaha, Syria, located along the Mediterranean Sea. They came to him and urged 'You are not a Wahhish, you are an Assad'. 'You are not a servant you are a lion' (Seal 1988 p.6).

Hama

In March 1980, Hafiz al-Assad, the leader of the Ba'ath party in Syria, is attempting to quell a wave of violent protests sweeping through the cities of Hama, Homs, Idlib Dayr al Zur and even the distant town of Hasaka beyond the Euphrates (Seale 1988 p.325). The protests are taking on the form of a large scale urban uprising. This trend continues for the next two years. While counter-terrorism operations are slow, the regime attempts to curry favor with local village leaders and civilians in order to quell the violence. In every city, citizen militias are formed and weapons are distributed to Ba'ath-affiliated Popular Organizations to counter the revolutionary Muslim Brotherhood who are working to usurp the Syrian government. The Muslim brotherhood is bitter after the Ba'ath party captured the state in 1963 (Seale 1988 p.

322). The group has grown angry and restive as traditional Sunni society is slowly being overturned, according to them, by "secular radicals" (Seale 1988 p.322). The government regime, facing targeted assassinations and bombings, is building a network of support to work against the highly organized Muslim Brotherhood. Already disgusted at the 1979 Aleppo massacre, where 32 young Alawite officer cadets were assassinated at the Artillery Military Academy in Aleppo by Islamic extremists, the regime is forced to respond to an increased revolutionary order. Assad's regime is attempting to go after the spearhead of the revolution. He dispatches military forces to shut down the clandestine operations set up by men such as Shayk 'Abd al-Rahman Abu Ghidda (founder the Islamic liberation) and Marwan Hadid (founder of Kata'ib Muhammad--Phalanxes of Muhammad) (Seale 1988 p.323). These men formed a network of opposition cells in Hama, stock piled weapons, and adopted guerilla tactics to use against the regime (Seale 1988 p. 323). Rif'at Assad, Hafiz's younger brother heads up the counter terrorism operation utilizing the military to his full discretion—under the mantra 'match brutality with brutality' (Seale 1988 p.327).

February 2nd and 3rd 1982: After two years of low level conflict, the city of Hama is officially under siege from armed members of the Muslim Brotherhood (Seale 1988 p.333). Seventy pro-government officials are killed in one night, and the Minarat sounds from the Masjid with calls of Jihad (Seale 1988 p.332). The Assad government utilizes house to house searches, preceded by tank fire (Seale 1988 p.327). The population is armed and pressed to choose between fighting for or against the government (Seale 1988 p.327). Twelve thousand soldiers are utilized to take back the city for the Assad government. Civilians are killed in large numbers by both insurgent forces as well as government soldiers (Seale 1988 p. 333). Over the course of three weeks, the full scale urban insurrection took around six thousand lives (Seale 1988 p.333). The Muslim Brotherhood in Hama was completely demolished along with thousands of homes, apartments and government buildings. The goal in rebuilding the city was to banish the idea of puritanism (religious influence) once and for all (Seale 1988 p.334). In rebuilding the city, a conscious effort was made not just to erase the past but to change attitudes (Seale 1988 p.334). "The Iron fist-method saved the regime, but changed its character forever" (Seale 1988 p.327).

Timeline

As the world becomes more interconnected through the rise of telecommunication networks and globalization, the gap between conventional and unconventional warfare also increases. Asymmetric warfare and terrorism has become a standard operating procedure for groups finding new ways to attack large forces. As insurgent and guerilla groups look to gain legitimacy among local populations in order to render political power, governments have had to counter guerillas and insurgent groups by formulating counterinsurgency strategies to retain legitimacy. The 21st century has seen a growth in insurgent forces particularly in areas of the world that have lacked functioning political stability or a government that can carefully aggregate the articulated interest of a community, giving rise to political instability and opposition movements who offer an alternative to government. These volatile settings can give way to insurgent groups who form on the fringe of social movements. The Cold War provided structure among the third and second world due to the financial backing of the United States and Soviet Union. With the collapse of the former Soviet Union, and the end of the Cold War the United States has found itself observing—through its own lens—the revolutionary changes that

have swept the world over the past decade. It has tried to find new ways to deal with evolving threats that have emerged as a result of the revolutionary changes. New security concerns—whether internal or external—among countries within the third and second world continue to affect the United States as it works to maintain the order of the international system.

Interstate war, although complex, has been easily fought for the past century in ways that were defined and subtly acceptable for both sides. A hegemonic power such as the United States historically has been careful in its application of force, but it has never hesitated to secure its interests and promote stability. This was evident in the 2003 intervention in Iraq to topple Saddam Hussein's regime. As subsequent insurgency has demonstrated however, states are less effective when dealing with challenges posed by non-state and transnational actors (Williams 2004 p.193). Insurgencies are appealing to those who seek change in the status quo against a more powerful adversary (Kiras 2005 p.190). Consequentially, the problem in Syria has stemmed from a long history of sectarianism, class warfare, and social inequalities. The growth of an internal struggle slowly developing in Syria is an example of how long-standing political concerns can manifest from latent to kinetic conflict. While the insurgency within Syria has grown over the past year—the uprising originally started in early 2011—the regional implications of the conflict make it difficult for the United States to formulate any strong operational policy option.

The conflict has transformed from a peaceful protest movement to a violent civil uprising that has pitted the twelve-year government of Bashar al Assad against an internal rebel movement. This intrastate conflict has caused the regime to revert to harsh tactics, such as the ones related to that of Hafiz al-Assad in the town of Hama in 1982, in order to suppress the long standing insurgency movement developing within the region. A cycle of violence has manifested itself into full scale civil war. The growth of sectarian violence and increase of foreign jihadist influence has allowed the conflict to progress into a large scale intrastate civil war. Long standing ethnic tensions and lack of opposition cohesion has limited the United States' policy orientation toward Syria.

This paper will closely examine the internal dynamics of the developing conflict in Syria as well as provide a brief history of the conflict and the current state of affairs. The paper will also give an overview of how the sectarian divide between the Sunni and Shia sects are shaping the conflict toward a large-scale civil war. I will argue that the country has developed into a breeding ground for regional jihadist organizations, causing a security dilemma for the United States and its allies.

The paper will focus exclusively on the regime in Syria, with regards to Bashar Al Assad and how he has dealt with the revolution thus far. It will also focus on how the Free Syrian Army has attempted to coalesce the rebel movement into one monolithic group to forge a formidable rebellion against the Syrian government. The historical overview will provide context for the conflict as well as explain the sectarian cleavages that exist within the country. The paper will provide a brief overview of the players involved, regional implications and potential policy options for the United States. Thus far peace plans under the auspices of the United Nations have not stopped the violence, and cease fire agreements have been broken. Lastly, I will give my policy options for the United States and an overall prediction about where the conflict is headed.

 "All conflicts involve a close examination of the quality of relationships that exist between each other socially, economically and culturally as well as how political decisions influence the population" (Ho Won Jeong 2010 p.1). Ho Won Jeong (2011) writes that in an internal conflict, an initially peaceful protest can be switched to mass violence or armed

campaign by militant groups due to government oppression of unarmed opposition movements (p.18). A similar situation has occurred in Syria, with the Assad government clamping down on violent protests with harsh retaliation. Conflict theory explains that the longer a conflict goes on, the more socialized the people involved in the conflict become. Syria is currently in its second year of fighting with no signs of any stable peace agreement. A series of intangible issues have emerged since the conflict started. Once the situation on the streets transcended from latent to kinetic conflict, issues such as pride, identity and security—which are all interconnected— emerged. From what can be understood about conflict, it is clear that the removal of a stable regional power holder can leave room for new local and regional conflicts to emerge (Woodhouse, Ramsbotham 2000 p.65). The Assad government has lost all control of governing on the local level, giving way to a complex emergency. We are seeing intrastate civil war taking shape due to the lack of central authority and harsh brutality by the government (Woodhouse, Ramsbotham 2000 p.65).

Context

December 2010 marked the first protests in northern Africa, later to become known as the 'Arab Spring.' Ben Gharbia, a Tunisian blogger, began posting leaked diplomatic cables involving corruption by President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. The published cables struck a chord with the rural population within Tunisia and they confirmed the populations' worst suspicion— Ben Ali was robbing the country (Sanger Audio 1:50). A June 2008 cable entitled '*What's yours is mine'* sent by Robert Godek, the American Ambassador in Tunisia at the time, stated, "Whether its cash, services, land property, or your yacht, if Ben Ali wants it, he will get it" (Sanger Audio 2012 1:52). Protests began to take shape in many small towns, and President Ben Ali realized that he could no longer control the country. Government corruption became tiring to the people and they began taking to the streets to protest their frustrations. In January 2011 a Tunisian man named Tarek al-Tayeb Mohamed Bouazizi lit himself on fire outside a government building after corrupt police officials took away his right to sell fruit in a crowded shopping area (Sanger Audio 2012). The event caused a chain reaction leading to unprecedented revolution throughout northern Africa into the near East that continues to this day. Since the events in Tunisia, a range of countries have experienced protests and armed uprisings. Protests around the region have led to monarchies being overthrown. These have included Egypt's Hosni Mubarak, Tunisa's Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Yemen's Abdullah Salah and Libya's Muammar Gaddafi. States such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan and the UAE have all experienced protests and continue to experience calls for political reform.

Syria has fallen into a different category because the regime itself has taken a much tougher approach on protesters due to a perceived security dilemma, resulting in violent backlash that has spiraled into a full insurgency. Currently in Syria, the Assad government is attempting to control the center—Damascus—while quelling rebel violence along the periphery. The protests started off peacefully regarding issues of deep dissatisfaction over socioeconomic and political concerns such as high unemployment, rampant corruption, limited upward mobility and repressive security laws; but the conflict slowly transformed into violence as the regime met protesters with a harsh response (Sanger 2011 1). The Syrian government perceives foreign terror groups as infiltrating the country and attempting to overthrow the government. As the conflict progresses the barriers to de-escalation increase and a resolution becomes even harder to reach. A deep seated mistrust has psychologically ruptured between a majority of the state and

civil society. As the conflict goes long term, deep psychological adaptations have occurred within society, making settlements and resolution even harder to foster.

History

   Modern day Syria sits in the heart of the Middle East bordering Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and the Mediterranean Sea. The Syrian state is currently run by 12-year president Bashar al Assad (Sharp 2011 p.1). In 1963 the Ba'ath party took control of Syria in a coup that re-organized the country. The Ba'th Party—Hizb al-ba'th al-'arabi or Party of the Arab Renaissance—was a group propelled by youthful disenfranchised students in the 1930s, articulating the political message of a few Arab Nationalists: Michel Aflaq, Salah al-Din Bitar, and Zaki-al Arsuzi—who eventually became Hafiz al- Asad's ideological mentor (Kienle 1990 p.2). The party merged in 1953 with Akram Hawrani's Arab Socialist Party and became the Arab Socialist Ba'th Party (Kienle 1990 3). The overall goal of the party was to articulate a secular Arab National identity based upon unified achievements. Ba'athism's underlining philosophy focused centrally on the citizens and bringing about an Arab rebirth by radically reshaping minds, attitudes, and self-conciseness (Seale 1988 p.29). Ba'athism rejected Islamic identity and replaced it with a national Syrian identity.

   In 1920, France took the northern part of Natural Syria (Jordan, Lebanon, north Israel) and renamed the area the Republic of Syria as part of the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 and the Balfour Declaration of 1917 (Seale 1988 14). In Arab eyes these treaties carved up and disposed of Natural Syria, which was never politically unified but bounded by the Taurus Mountains to the north, the Mediterranean to the west, the Euphrates to the east and the Arabian Desert to the south (Seale 1988 p.14). In the minds of Syrians living within the borders of Natural Syria, many viewed themselves as homogeneous in culture (Seale 1988 p.14). They felt threatened by economic ties and often referred to themselves as living in Bilad al-Sham "the land of Damascus" (Seale 1988 p.14).

   The French elevated groups within society and completely changed the way rural life operated within Syria. The French saw that Greater Syria was largely dominated by the Sunni sect of Islam which was unfriendly toward them, so they worked with the mountain haven minority groups and pitted Alawis, Ismailis, and Druzes against rural and urban Sunni groups (Seale 1988 117). The current Syrian state consists of many different sectarian groups living within the same borders. These groups consist of Sunnis, Shiites, Christians, Jews and subgroups within these sects. The Assad family belongs to one subgroup within the Shia minority sect known as the Alawites, or originally referred to as the Nusayriya (see Chapter on *Groups within Syria*). The current conflict has become exacerbated by the sectarian cleavages. The Alawites dominate the government, making up 16 % of the country's religious minority (CIA.gov Syria). According to the CIA, the majority of the country's population subscribes to the Sunni doctrine of Islam—around 74 %—with other denominations rounding out the bottom at around 10 % (CIA.gov Syria).

   During the 1920s, the French began to pacify the minority sects within the mountains but met resistance by many, including Ali Sulayman—who was Bashar al-Assad's grandfather (Seale 1988 p.17). The natural tendency was to be resistant toward the occupying French, but eventually groups began warming up to their colonial rulers after ambassadors gave the rural minorities greater priorities within society (Seale 1988 p.17). Under Ottoman rule, Sunnis took advantage of Alawi labor and controlled the rural and urban wealth within the country. The social mobility of the Alawites improved under the French. They gave them priority in tobacco

farming and military service, where many received steady income and useful training. Local authority slowly became delineated toward high ranking Alawite families under the French indirect ruling system (Seale 1988 p.18). "Alawis acquired a sense of opportunities which in the anarchy and poverty of their lives they had never known before" (Seale 1988 p.22). But once the French left Syria, the gaps between the Sunni and Shia sects began to widen. Many sects such as the Alawites were seen as corroborators with the French which also meant they were disloyal to Arab unity and nationalism (Seale 1988 p23).

Although life for minority groups had improved under French rule, social mobility was still hard to attain. The rifts between communities continued to rise into the 1950s. The army was an attractive alternative. After Syrian independence in 1946, the Military Academy at Homs abolished fees and thus became the only institution to offer poor boys a start in life (Seale p.38). It was from within the military academies that the Assad monarchy rose and took power within the country. Once Ba'athism was firmly established within government, a long process of secular nationalist sentiment took hold in Syria. Hafiz Al Assad took control of the government in 1970 through an officer coup. He ruled the country for 30 years, until he passed away in 2000 and his son Bashar Al Assad became President and Chief of State on July 17, 2000 (CIA.gov Syria).

In February of 2011, Syria had already begun to see signs of small protests developing in towns throughout the southern region (Snider 2011 p.2). These protests were meant to articulate political grievances (Snider 2011 p.2). The groups organized utilizing new media forms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, and even went as far as organizing a 'Day of Rage' modeled after the Egyptian protests organized in Cairo a few months earlier (Snider 2011 p.2). Many of the protests were organized by a group called the Local Coordinating Committee (LCC) based out of Beirut (Starr 2012 p.98). The LCC would work to help put out figures, videos, and Tweets while Skyping news organizations to help organize protests. Eventually the LCC became a strategic communication organization that helped mobilize young people on the ground (Starr 2012 p.99).

In March 2011, protests began to break out in the small town of Dara'a located in the southern province of Syria. A group of fifteen teenagers were rounded up by Syrian police for spray painting the slogan "The people want the regime to fall" on private property (Abouzeid 2011 p.1). Protests began growing, and on March 18th a larger protest took place in Dara'a that resulted in the death of six civilians by security forces trying to control the protests (Snider 2011 p.3). At the funerals the next day, people began to gather in large numbers. Security forces sealed off the city and began trying to disassemble the large protests. The events culminated in a large protest that led to the Ba'ath Party headquarters being set on fire, government buildings being destroyed, and police killing demonstrators (Snider 2011 p. 2). The government responded by launching an investigation into why the civilians were killed, and sending mediators to the town of Dara'a to help citizens articulate their grievances.

Although the government attempted to secure the city of Dara'a, protests continued for the remainder of the month, resulting in more civilian deaths and a larger presence of army soldiers and secret police on the streets (Snider 2011 p.4). By March 26th nearly 61 people had been killed and the government had amassed the army, large scale militias and secret police to contain the violence. On the political side, the Assad government began to offer concessions to some of the protestors' demands, including the dismissal of the provincial government in Dara'a, more media freedom, and increased salaries for public workers (Snider 2011 p.4). The President continued to blame external forces such as Israel and Salafists—a puritan Islamic group, seeking to model themselves after their pious ancestors—operating within Syria. The regime also placed

the blame on extremist groups such as Jund Asham, an obscure fundamentalist group with links to al-Qaeda and Fatah al-Islam (Abouzied 2011 p.2).

By the end of March and into April, protests began to break out in the port city of Lataka, Homs, Allepo, Damascus, the port city of Baniyas and Hama. The areas surrounding Damascus became the most concerning for the regime because the government's power center revolves around the capital city—Damascus. Within the city itself life continued as usual, further showing the disparities and unequal distribution of socioeconomic conditions within the country (Starr 2012 p.8). Towns such as Douma and Madamyiyeh—a conservative town with a rich history of anti-colonialism and Syrian nationalism—all experienced protests, located only a few short miles away from the Damascus city center (Starr 2012 p.12). Most protests at this point were taking place outside Masjid's after Khutba. Armed security officials in small towns waited outside Masjid's to put down protests quickly. Many protestors were influenced by their prayer leaders while others gathered simply to join the large crowds in expressing disdain for the government.

On April 25th after 109 people were killed in a single day of protests, the Assad government ordered armored military units to enter Dara'a to "destroy the symbol of where the uprising started" (Snider 2011 p.5). In an attempt at reform along with the harsh crack down on protests, Assad agreed to lift the 48-year-old emergency law—putting an end to surprise arrests and forced detention without a warrant or trial (Starr 2012 p.5). He also followed through with a committee to investigate the civilian deaths in the town of Dara'a (Abouzeid 2011 p.1). The reforms were met with minimal enthusiasm by protestors who continued to riot. President Assad decided to meet these riots using similar tactics to those displayed of his father Hafiz in Hama. Various military groups such as the Syrian Republican Guard and small militias were deployed all over Syria using house to house tactical raids in an attempt to weed out protestors (Snider 2011 p.5). The government established check points, cut telephone lines, and implemented a police state apparatus over cities and rural towns (Snider 2011 p.5).

Along with the kinetic activity, the regime also began a large scale strategic communication operation, putting out information through the nation's radio broadcast and state run news agency SANA (Starr 2012 p.11). The message was unified and clear: the regime was fighting against international forces seeking to weaken Syria and shake the county's strong morale (Starr 2012 p.11). Semi-independent newspapers had now turned in full favor of the regime and ran columns stating that 'terrorist groups' had been responsible for the destruction of buildings and the death of civilians in many small towns (Starr 2012 p.16). Large groups of protestors gathered outside the BBC and Al Jazeera offices shouting pro-government slogans demanding the organizations to leave the country (Starr 2012 p.14). Pro-regime supporters began counter protests in villages such as Midan to galvanize the public and show that the government was still popular. The regime would also group together pro-government supporters and bus them to locations where anti-government protests were taking place. The state television followed and reported on the pro-government rallies (Starr 2012 p.29).

All publications must go through the Ministry of Information in order to be approved for dissemination. This makes any criticism of the government—unless done by independent media sources—nearly impossible. Most publications critical of the regime are scrutinized by government officials and often never published. The media put out one centralized message with a thesis that stated: Syria (not just the regime) was facing an external campaign to destabilize the country (Starr 2012 p.54). The central theme set out to not only de-legitimize protestors but also help gather support from minority groups whose interests were at stake if the government should fall. Attempts at currying favor with local minority groups are done through media outlets as

well. For example, through the state run TV station Dunia interviews are broadcast with local Christian priests and Shia Sheikhs for the purpose of displaying solidarity and support for the regime (Starr 2012 p.44).

The protests quickly became too large for the government to control. All over Syria protestors were taking to the streets in large numbers. The funerals served as an outlet for protestors, which worked against the Syrian regime's tactics because every time a protestor was killed, funerals would bring more people into the streets to protest (Snider 2011 p.7). A turn of events occurred in May, when the body of Hamza Ali al Khateeb—a 13-year-old boy—was returned to his family mutilated by Syrian security forces (Sanger Audio 4:25). The story made international news and the world began to pay attention to what was currently taking shape within Syria. U. S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that the mutilation of the child was an abomination and "the event should symbolize the total collapse of any effort by the Syrian government to work with and listen to their own people" (Snider 2011 p. 13). This became the watershed event for Syria, and turned the tide for the conflict. By the summer of 2011, in areas such as Jisr al-Shughour and Rashtan, protestors turned violent. The peaceful mass street protests were now engaged in armed conflict against Bashar Assad's government (Flood 2012 p.1).

The violence has been growing for the past year and a half. While the first protests began in the spring of 2011, armed resistance has been in full effect since the summer of 2011. The government's response has resulted in full assaults on Syria's cities by targeting rebel-held neighborhoods using tanks, heavy artillery, and sniper fire, which has reportedly resulted in hundreds of civilian deaths (Haggerty 2012 p.7). The term civil war has been fully associated with the conflict since the spread of violence has become prevalent in every city from Damascus to the north of Aleppo.

There have been more than one hundred and forty civil wars around the world since 1945. These wars have killed approximately 20 million people and displaced over 67 million (Sambanis 2007 p.1). Civil war can be simply defined as "an internal armed conflict among two or more state or non-state actors" (Sambanis 2007 p.1). While the definition of civil war, insurrection, insurgency and political violence often become interchangeable, they all encompass aspects of internal violence. People fighting their fellow citizens act no less cruelly than those fighting people from another state (Goldstein, Pevehouse 2009 p.151). Syria bares no exception to this definition, and has fallen further into a conflict that pits sectarian groups against one another. The government has been particularly conscious about making a statement with its military action. By utilizing armored force and air superiority to overpowers rebels, the regime has made it known that they are not giving up the country easily.

The UN attempted to broker a ceasefire in early 2012, but essentially failed as violence broke out putting an end to peace talks. The UN Security Council remains divided on exactly what course of action is the most appropriate for the conflict. Russia and China have twice vetoed a UN peace plan calling for Assad to step down. While regional actors such as the Arab League and the E.U. attempt to impose sanctions upon the regime, peace observers—under the direction of a peace plan established by Kofi Annan—entered the country in Spring 2012 but left after failing to impose a ceasefire. It is important to note that this conflict is no longer self-contained. As of September 2012, the conflict has become a transnational issue spilling over into the border of Turkey. This not only creates a new dynamic for the conflict but also exemplifies the necessity to find a solution to the growing crises.

Groups Operating within Syria

In order to understand the full spectrum of the current civil war, one must fully understand the current opposition groups that exist within the state. Since the outbreak of violence in February of 2011, many local populations have organized themselves out of survival. As of May 2012 the insurgency expanded to around 40,000 members (Holiday 2012 p.6). As violence progressed from the southern city of Dara'a to Aleppo and the surrounding provinces, many citizens began (and still are) taking up arms against the regime. This has led to a protracted low intensity intrastate civil conflict that has far-reaching effects on every part of civil society. Many citizens have been left with little options on how to survive the current violence, so they have organized themselves to respond to the brutality of the government as well as extreme anti-regime militia gangs. The groups operating within Syria can be considered both 'guerillas' and 'insurgents' because they are a numerically larger group of armed individuals who operate as a military unit, attack enemy military forces, and seize and hold territory (Hoffman 2006 35). They also fit the definition of insurgents due to psychological warfare efforts they use to mobilize popular support in their struggle (Hoffman 2006 p.35). The term rebel is used to refer to the overarching resistance movements developing in Syria; this section breaks down those groups even further.

The Free Syrian Army (FSA) was established in July of 2011, by defected members of the Syrian Republican Guard, as the de-facto resistance movement (Holiday 2012 p.1). The movement's main headquarters is stationed in Turkey, where it coordinates a majority of its command and control operations (although as of September the leader of the FSA Riad al-Asaad moved the headquarters back in Syria). The critical juncture in the evolution of the FSA occurred when regime forces took the town of Jisr al-Shughour with heavy bombardment (Flood 2012 p.1). The attack on the city created an exodus of refugees—some military, some civilian—into Turkey and the declaration of the establishment of the FSA to fight against the regime through a war of attrition (Flood 2012 p.1).

While the FSA is considered by many to be the overarching resistance organization that represents the opposition in Syria, the group holds little influence over many opposition organizations currently fighting. There are currently over nine provisional military units fighting within Syria, each having their own command structure based on some form of regional association (The Economist, September 2012 Middle East and Africa). Some reports go even further and estimate that there are around twelve established rebel groups, with many subgroups branching off further (Starr 2012 p.1). Although many rebels are fractured according to policy makers who have analyzed the FSA, others claim the group has been successful in establishing regional command centers, which demonstrates their capacity to hold command above the local level (Holiday 2012 p.17). In some ways, the ability to have command and control over operations is growing as the conflict escalates because more civilians are becoming involved. The group has an active secular military presence but it is proving to be more and more difficult to consolidate military forces as more people join the resistance. The only unifying factor among the groups operating within Syria is their mutual understanding that Bashar Al-Assad must be removed from power. All the provisional military units that exist under the FSA are based on regional, tribal, and clan affiliations rather than the FSA structure (Starr 2012 p.1). The FSA utilizes a flag that represents a pre Ba'ath era history as a way to differentiate themselves from those still loyal to the regime (Flood 2012 p.2). It was first flown in 1932 during the decolonization period (Flood 2012 p.2). The flag has a green, white, and black tricolor with three fix pointed stars symbolizing the three vilayets (administrative regions) of Damascus,

Aleppo and Deir-ez-Zor (Flood 2012 p.2). The flag is meant to separate FSA from most Jihadi groups who look to exploit transnational caliphate imagery with a shared history emphasizing Islam rather than Syria (Flood 2012 p.2). The FSA operates under one strategic goal which is narrowly limited to the overthrow of the Syrian state (Flood 2012 p.2).

One could argue that the guerilla tactics of leaderless resistance has led to an effective insurgency by the rebels, but it has also left many forces isolated and easily targeted by the regime. The groups operate on divided objectives: some universal—get rid of Assad—but mostly self-fulfilling—maintain enough forces to have a stake in government when Assad falls (Starr 2012 p.1). Due to the lack of a central command and distributed orders, the rebels may hold a city for a day or two until eventually they are overtaken by the Syrian government. A prime example would be the city of Aleppo, which has been held numerous times by rebel forces until it is immediately taken back by the government after a few days of fighting. Rebels control swathes of land up near the Turkish border and have recently forced the regime to abandon a string of checkpoints in and around Marat Numan, a town in Idleb province (The Economist Oct. 2012 Middle East Africa). Some tribute the success of the rebel fighters to an influx of external support via states that have regional interests in a post-Assad regime.

On the political side, the Syrian National Council (SNC) was established. This group operates as the de-facto government in exile opposed to Bashar al-Assad. The central group is located outside of Syria, mainly in Turkey, where they work to find a political solution to the current crises. The group was established in August 2011 and is comprised of a coalition of opposition leaders who have fled the country. Some states have given the SNC international recognition as a legitimate body, but the group has struggled to homogenize as a working unit to help facilitate an effective diplomatic resistance. The SNC has gone through multiple leadership changes over the past year making it difficult for the international community to choose whom within the group they can work with diplomatically.

The opposition started out as mainly secular, but as the fighting has progressed there has been a growing religiosity among rebel fighters (Economist 2012 nov.3 Middle East). As attacks on civilians have increased, many people have turned to religion for the answer. An influx of jihadi groups have found a haven within Syria and are attempting to establish a base of operations within the state. The Economist reports that around 5% of the rebels operating within the country are Islamists and that number is growing. Groups such as al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra have become two major extremist players operating in the region. It is evident that since Syria has become more destabilized and groups have formed under sectarian and tribal ties, the door has been left open for jihadists to flood the country. Their goal is also to overthrow the government and bring in a strictly Islamic society. Without the security apparatus of a central state, Syria is taking on the characteristics of a lawless failed state. These groups have been killing and torturing local populations while attempting to usher in strict forms of Sharia law into un-governed regions in North Eastern Syria. Currently, fundamentalist groups have a strong hold in Idlib province and small towns along the Northern border where the government currently has little strategic influence.

The Salafists are a major Islamist group operating in the region. They account for a small strand of the rebel forces, but their militia presence is growing (Economist Oct 2012 Middle East and Africa p.1). Salafism is a branch of Whabbism extending from Saudi Arabia. The ideology preaches a doctrine of puritanism and its influence is closely aligned with fringe elements of extremism. Groups such as Al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra follow the doctrine preached by Salafists as well. Salafism accounts for a part of the increased religiosity of the opposition in

Syria. They are one of many groups backed by Sunni regimes in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Although Salafism is an overarching group affiliation, many smaller organizations are aligning themselves with Salafists because they are well funded (Starr 2012 p.1). The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood works closely with Salafists to increase their operational capacity. The Muslim Brotherhood receives funding from Gulf States and controls armed militia networks throughout the region. According to the Washington Post in mid-May the Muslim Brotherhood claimed it "opened its own supply channels to the rebels, using resources from wealthy private individuals and money from Gulf States, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar" (Holiday 2012 p.2). The group is also recruiting smaller organizations to fight under its banner by infiltrating refugee camps and offering incentives to smaller rebel organizations (Holiday 2012 p.29).

The dynamic between FSA rebels and Islamist rebels differ depending on reports. The FSA claims to be secular while other reports show the FSA depending upon Islamists to help them fight. For example, in early October it was reported that Salafist militia fighters burst into a village church close to Latakia—homeland of the Alawites—ripped the cross from the church and killed an Alawite citizen for his religion (The Economist Middle East and Africa Oct. 2012). This was after FSA members had made significant gains in the region. Another report done by Ghaith Abdul-Ahad (2012)—a reporter for the Guardian Newspaper who is embedded with rebel forces in Syria says that groups such as the Ghuraba'a (Strangers) are one of a number of Jihadi organizations establishing a foothold in the country by working closely with the military council that commands local FSA brigades (pg.1).

The dynamic that exists between the secular rebels and jihadist is focused on the end goal. Whether a group is religious or secular, both exist under a mandate to end the Syrian government. While many FSA members claim the jihadi groups are not working alongside them, men such as Abu Khuder who fights for Al-Qaeda claims his brigade meets with the Free Syrian Army "every day" (Abdul-Ahad 2012 p.1). This may be a relationship of necessity at this point as rebel groups are still attempting to figure out how to fight the Syrian government's superior force. Khuder claims that the FSA utilizes jihadi fighters when they need tough missions accomplished. He claims the FSA knows that the jihadist have the strongest will and can utilize tactics such as suicide bombings and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to accomplish a mission (Abdul-Ahad 2012 p.1). It is also evident that some FSA affiliates feel their organization lacks the military experience to plan attacks to further progress the opposition's goal (Abdul-Ahad 2012 p.2). Many groups notice the effectiveness of Al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra in their military tactics which makes them attractive to young recruits and regional organizations looking to engage the Syrian militarily.

As more Islamist groups establish a working relationship with secular groups, the Syrian population is caught in the crossfire. The fighting has come to a point where civilians are being attacked by both rebels and government forces. For example, in Raqqa province east of Aleppo, where rebel groups such as the Faraouq Brigade launch attacks against the regime, many civilians have to deal with reactionary shelling by the government (Economist Oct. 2012 Middle East Africa). Cities around Raqqa are now home to thousands of displaced people trying to escape the fighting. One local villager was quoted as saying, "Bashar Assad is a dog, a murderer. But we don't like fighters either. We are tired and want peace" (Economist Oct. 2012 Middle East and Africa p.2). Salafists and Jihadists have become more prominent causing tension among rebels and civilians. With the rise in suicide bombings like the one October 9th claimed by Jahabat al-Nusra against government forces, civilians have become more fearful of the rebels

now (Economist Oct 2012 Middle East and Africa p.2). This is not productive to the rebel movement's overall goal. In order to bring down Assad the rebels will need popular support, but the increase in religious rhetoric is shifting people back on the side of the government.

Although the FSA is trying not to ascribe to the Islamists' agenda, an influx of rebel fighters have also begun to flood the region from areas as far as Libya (Starr 2012 p.3). A Libyan fighter from the town of Idlib was quoted as saying, "We are fighting for truth and justice, and an Islamic background" (Starr 2012 p.1). Rebel fighters from Libya bring with them strict Islamic ideology that is being introduced to fighters on the ground. This has begun to characterize the rebel movement and in some ways delegitimize their cause. While the FSA and other regional rebel groups affiliated with the FSA have been quick to accept money and arms from Gulf States, they have also accepted the increased religiosity. One FSA commander in the town of Deir el-Zour explained the role of religion by saying that "Religion is the best way to impose discipline. Even if the fighter is not religious he can't disobey a religious order in battle" (Abdul-Ahad 2012 p.3). It is clear religion is being utilized as a tool to help bolster the rebellion and provide a useful rallying cry for fighters (Abdul-Ahad 2012 p.3).

The Assad regime is also utilizing militia groups of its own to intimidate civilians and fight against the rebel movement. The Shabiha (ghost) is a militia group comprised of Shi'a Alawites—many of them former prisoners and gang members—who are pro Assad (Starr 2012 p.4). The regime hires and finances them—as well as Hezbollah and Iran—to destabilize the region and conduct brutal operations against Sunni rebels (Starr 2012 p.4). These groups have made their way into small towns and villages committing various war crimes, including rape and torture, in order to deter Syrians from joining rebel groups (Starr 2012 p.40). Assad is attempting to subjugate the region among sectarian lines to ensure that fighting against the rebels continues. This group also poses another danger if the Assad regime falls. The group itself is loyal to the Alawite minority sect, and the possibility remains that if Assad's government does get overtaken, the Shabiha may launch a counter-insurgency against the new government in order to retake power for the Alawite minority (Starr 2012 p.3).

It is important to realize that each group has their own agenda. Al-Qaeda, Jabhat al-Nusra, Libyan freedom fighters, and sects of the Muslim Brotherhood are all operating within the country, participating in operations against the Syrian government. Each group will attempt to consolidate power if the government should fall. At this current moment, the FSA is just trying to win battles the best it can, utilizing the resources available. One of the biggest challenges the FSA faces is controlling its forces and organizing the resistance. For example, every time the Shabiha massacres Sunni villagers, it becomes harder for FSA leadership to control the rising tide of retaliatory extra-judicial killings (Holiday 2012 p.9). Although there have been set backs, the rebels continue to make progress in the region. As of June 2012, the FSA along with other provisional military units have controlled large swathes of land in Homs and Aleppo, giving the insurgency a sense of legitimacy (Holiday 2012 p.9). The increase in operational success is due to weapons and funding being received through Gulf States. As they attempt to storm Damascus, controlling territory is becoming increasingly important both symbolically and logistically.

While these groups may work together now to help bring down the regime, they all want a stake in the post-Assad government. Some groups want a secular state, while others are looking to establish a pure Islamic state. The rebel groups have seen success over the past year, but continually fail to hold large cities and large amounts of territory. While the insurgency continues to evolve, it will have to make an effort to fully consolidate groups through networks that support one another and limit in-fighting to reach the overall objective. Provisional military

councils have been established and safe zones within Syria are slowly being carved out from territory gained in battle. There are two questions moving forward when it comes to the insurgency: Can the insurgency mature enough to launch an effective resistance that can hold territory long enough for the Assad regime to fall? And second, what role will Jihadi groups play in helping to overthrow the regime?

Sectarian Groups within Syria

Internal violence has led many former protestors to take up arms against the Assad government. While the first protests were taking place, opposition groups began organizing themselves. The isolation and unanticipated duration of the conflict has led to increased sectarianism and kept the conflict highly asymmetrical as rebel groups continue to fight well-armed pro-regime forces (Flood 2012 p.2).   Articulating the major players involved in the conflict has been hard because of the many different groups that have a stake in what happens to the state. Everyone's interests are tied up in the government whether you have a direct link or not (Starr 2012 p.18). Each group has seminal and parochial interests. With so many groups competing against one another, fighting between groups can sometimes overshadow the overall goal of a movement.

Regional ties also play a large part in the conflict. Societal makeup in Syria can be broken down into neighborhood and clan affiliations. Fifty-six percent of the population lives among rural cities (CIA fact book Syria). People in the capital live under Shami—the Damascus mindset—which is a proud upper middle class mentality that has little regard for the rural class (Starr 2012 p.20). These people are different because they benefit from the regime. They are large scale business owners and merchants who have interests tied up in the government (Starr 2012 p.18). "The rich would prefer change, but to the extent of civil war, and if there is change it's OK but they won't participate," according to one citizen in Damascus (Starr 2012 p.19). Although this may be true, many people living in the capital are from places where the uprisings are taking place (Starr 2012 p. 24). These are people who moved to Damascus a generation ago from Dara'a, Madamyeh, Douma, and other small towns (Starr 2012 p.23). Still, even along sectarian lines there is a divergence between groups living in urban city areas and rural communities. For example, Christians living in the urban cities do not fear an Islamist take over while rural Christians are fearful because of their experiences living with rural Islamic doctrine (Starr 2012 p.26). According to some citizens, "Many rural, less advantaged Syrians have supported the opposition movement, while urban, wealthier Syrians appear to have more divided loyalties" (Sharp Blancbard 2012 p.1).

In order to help facilitate a better understanding of the conflict, one must view the age gaps that exist. According to some reports, three generations of people exist within Syria (Starr 2012 p.4). The old families: these are the people who really have no interest in change but fear for their younger families if there is change (Starr 2012 p.24). The Bashar Al-Assad generation: these are people who have worked their way up the political chain (Starr 2012 p.24). They are small business owners who have worked a lifetime to be where they are. These people have interests at stake and many of them see no benefit from large scale change (Starr 2012 p.24). Lastly, the young generation who are between the ages of twenty and thirty-five (Starr 2012 p.24). These are the ones who cannot find jobs and have protested in large numbers because they feel disenfranchised by the establishment (Starr 2012 p.24). According to a 2010 European Union report, 70% of Syria's population is under thirty years old (Starr 2012 p.137). These

people need jobs and their civil unrest reflects the idea of underemployment which has plagued the country for decades (Starr 2012 p.138).

As it stands currently, the minority groups operating within Syria each have their own agenda and historical culture that helps shape their views of the current uprising. According to CIA fact book, Sunni Muslims make up 74% of the population, Shia Muslims—including Alawites, Druze's and Isma'ilis—make up 16% and Christian and Jews of various denominations make up 10%. As the evidence has shown thus far during the revolution, sectarianism is playing an ever expanding role. The traditional linkage between ruler and sect seems to play out in Syria as it does any country where fractious sectarianism exists. Although a number of different religious groups exist within Syria—known as the cultural gem of the Middle East—the Ba'ath party attempted to unite the country under a national spirit that transcended religious beliefs (Starr 2012 p.53). Bath'ism was designed to replace the tribal affiliations with a modern notion of citizenship (Seale 1988 p.9). The rebellion today is breaking out of this mindset and attempting to replace it.

The first group that needs to be addressed within the heterogeneous society that is Syria is the Alawites. As stated previously, the Alawites are a small minority sect of the Syrian population that makes up the majority of the government apparatus. The idea of crony capitalism still exists in Syria. Government appointments are done through social and religious ties, often giving an upper hand to citizens belonging to a specific sect. This is evident in every area of life: from municipal government and district leaders to official military appointments and head ministry positions. For example, in order to control the media most contracts are given to Christians or Alawites, or members of the Assad family whom the government knows supports the regime (Starr 2012 p.58). It is important to realize that once the Alawite minority took control over Syria, a conscious effort was made to elevate one class of society over others. "Anyone who is tied to the regime is awarded the contracts" (Starr 2012 p.58). This idea is echoed throughout society and reveals itself in many different forms.

The Alawites are known as 'Mountain people' and come from many small villages located along the Mediterranean Sea. Their lineage can be traced back to Hasan Bin Makzum—a famous religious leader who died in 1240 (Seale 1988 p.8-9). They were constantly under persecution so they relocated from areas in Iraq and lower Syria to the west mountains near the Mediterranean Sea. Alawites belong to one of four main tribal confederations—the Haddadin, the Matawira, the Khaiyatin, and the Kalbiya (Seale 1988 p.9).The Assad family belong to the Kalbiya (Seale 1988 p.9). The Alawites were given their name under French rule; the community was originally known as Nusayriya after one of its alleged founders Muhammad Ibn Nusayr, a 9th century propagandist (Seale 1988 p.9). Some argue the name comes from the Ansaryia, which is the traditional name of the mountain range the Alawites first inhabited (Seal 1988 p.9). The name Alawi (or Alawite) means follower of Ali, and from what is understood of the group they are mainly an offshoot of the Twelver sect of Shia Islam (Seale 1988 p.9). Their ascension into power came at the hands of opportunities provided by military academies and officer programs established by the French ruling mandate (Jones 2006 p. 103).

The group reached moderate success under the guise of French rule. As stated previously many of the Alawite communities were elevated during the French Colonial era. By the time the Assad family ruled over Syria (1970) many closely tied Alawite communities under the Kalibya tribal confederation were given priority in the new government. The Alawis number only around 15% of the population but hold upward of 80% of government positions (Jones 2006 p.103). Even before the Assad family took over, the defeat of the '67 war with Israel reinforced

tendencies toward loyalties other than civic, particularly toward smaller societal units, down to families or factions and cliques (*jama'at*) (Kienle 1991 27). Although Ba'athism preached unity, Bashar has continued this idea of clique rule throughout his administration, which has strengthened his ethnic and kinship ties among Alawites while causing tension among other groups (Kienle 1991 p.28). Protestors are often referring to the idea of clique rule when they ask for reforms within government. Through gangs and cliques, Bashar created a vast network of friends and alliances to strengthen his grip on the country. Ebrehard Kienle (1991) asserts in his Book *Ba'th v Ba'th: The conflict between Syria and Iraq 1968- 1989* , that "generally the clientalistic networks trained and cultivated by the regime disrupt solidarity at the class level as they offer selective access to resources, consequently the dangers of class power recede" (p.24-25). This has caused fractions to erupt among society at the class level and has spawned what many people believe is the main driving force for the protestors, who are looking for political reform. Now that the revolution has developed into war, many are reverting back to their old tendencies—even though they are protesting against them—of neglecting the state apparatus and turning to the smaller societal units.

Another seminal group that exists within Syria—the majority of protestors and rebel fighters—are Sunni Muslims. Of Syria's nearly seventeen million people, nearly thirteen and half million people belong to the mainstream sect of Islam (Jones 2006 p.104). Their Islamic doctrine follows the rightfully guided Caliphs as the proper successor of Muhammad, which differs greatly from Shia doctrine which follows Ali as the first Imam. An overwhelming majority of the uprising belongs to the Sunni sect. These Syrians are protesting in response to the unfair treatment their sect has received under the minority Alawite government. Historically Sunnis were treated well under Ottoman rule and have always enjoyed moderate wealth and success within the Middle East. For most of the 18th and 19th centuries, harsh treatment of minority groups such as Alawites and Druzes was at the hands of wealthy Sunni landowners. Since Assad came to power—Bashar in the year 2000—the elevation of the Sunni class has not been a major priority of the leadership. "Ill will goes back four decades, when Hafiz Assad first came to power" (The Economist Nov.3rd Middle East).

The history of the 1982 revolt in Hama, which was led by the Sunni dominate Muslim Brotherhood, is one example of the relationship Sunnis have with the state. While the Muslim Brotherhood does not represent all Sunnis, the tensions that exist between both Sunni and Shia groups are well documented in subversion attempts and uprisings that have occurred over the past 30 years. Since the 1980s, the Ba'ath party has been able to keep a clamp on the sectarian cleavages that have existed in society because the regime focused on Arab nationalism. But as it stands currently, close to 10,000 Syrians have been killed since protests started in March 2011 (Sharp Blanchard 2012 p.3). The mostly Sunni-Arab resistance has been met with brutality in what many analysts believe to be a deliberate attempt to fuel sectarian tensions, instill fear in the population, and confront ordinary Syrians with an unappealing choice: either continue to acquiesce to Alawite-minority rule or face the prospect of civil war and possible state collapse (Sharp, Blanchard 2012 p.3). Many of the Sunni protestors are fighting for sectarian rule, but they protest under the auspices of being a Muslim, which is why the government considers them the existential threat (Starr 2012 p.51). As Sunni groups operate within organizations such as the FSA and local militia groups, many of their efforts are being undermined by Islamist groups operating under Sunni Islamic doctrine as well. Many pious Muslims not only have to deal with the government attacking them but also conservative members of their own sect attempting to impose strict Shari'a law. The puritan sects of Sunni Islam operating within the country include:

Al-Qaeda, Salafists, and the Muslim Brotherhood (as discussed in section 4). These groups add to the sectarian divide that already exists between the Shia run state and Sunni majority population.

While Sunni Muslims continue to make up the majority of protestors, many minority groups are also choosing sides in the conflict. Other smaller minority groups who have a stake in the outcome of the conflict are Christians, Druzes and Kurds. Christians are largely viewed as pro-government supporters who have a long history of good relations with the Syrian government. They occupy many positions of authority and are often accustom to elevated treatment from the regime. In terms of socioeconomic status, Christians are viewed by many as the wealthiest minority in the state, even surpassing that of the Alawites (Starr 2012 p. 34). Many Christian communities have existed in Syria for thousands of years, long before Islam spread into the region. As a result of their long history, Christians have lived well under Muslim leadership. Their stake in the uprising is somewhat dualistic. Many communities support the government and are afraid of what a post Assad state may look like for them (Starr 2012 p.32). Others within the scattered Christian communities are very closely aligned with Sunnis who live in the same towns and villages as them. While Christians are not unified in their views of the government, many have been disowned for displaying anti-government rhetoric, which may be an indication of where many Christians stand on the uprising (Starr 2012 p.32).

The Kurds are considered Syria's third class citizens but account for 10% of the population, making them the largest minority group in the region (Starr 2012 p.35). In 1920, under the Treaty of Sevres, the Kurds were supposed to be granted their own state, but after the Ottoman Empire fell and the Treaty of Lausanne was signed in 1923, an independent Kurdish state was never established (Starr 2012 p.35). The community resides mostly in the northeastern part of the region—Qamishli, Raqqa, Hasake—and swathes near Turkey (Starr 2012 p.39). But while the Kurds suffered under both Assad regimes, when the uprising began they became the 'odd man out' in the revolt (Starr 2012 p.39). "This is an Arab uprising and we are not Arab" (Starr 2012 p.39). In 2004, the Kurdish minority revolted against the government in an attempt to bring about changes in labor laws and socioeconomic status while pushing for autonomy and respect (Starr 2012 p.35). The revolt was put down but serves as a reminder that the Kurds are always attempting to assert themselves. Due to the recent protests, the Assad government in 2011 gave citizenship to over 300,000 stateless Kurds in order to quell some of the violence (Starr 2012 p.35). Although within this revolution many Kurds have found themselves aloof from violence, staying along the fringe. They are a Sunni group that does support a new regime, but overall they understand that a new government may result in a more threatening environment than already exists.

The Druze are another minority Muslim group that live within Syria. They are considered part of the Shia Islamic sect and an offshoot of the Isma'ilis (Jones 2006 p.102). Half a million Druze live in southwest Syria in the Houran and Jabal region (Starr 2012 p.49). Both areas have a strong history of revolt, and many local Druze have taken part in the revolts in Dara'a and other southern towns (Starr 2012 p.49). They are part of a very secretive community which attempts to keep to itself but has been thrown into the recent conflict. While some Druze are critical of the regime—protests have occurred in Druze dominate regions—the community itself has tried to maintain a peaceful stance toward the government as well as the rebel movement to ensure future prosperity.

While it is easy to say that one community feels a particular way about the regime due to past experiences, it is important to remember that many of the opinions and thoughts on the

regime are based upon regional ties. Some sub-groups may feel a particular way about the regime, while the overall consensus of the larger group may have a differing opinion from what many consider the collective community's opinion. From interviews conducted on the street, there is often no underlining narrative that defines a group's opinion. One Christian Syrian journalist, Jihad Yazigi, stated, "The Christian community is not united in its support of the regime but many are afraid to speak out—not because they are afraid of being detained by security services, but because they are afraid of being stigmatized in their communities" (Starr 2012 p.69).

The regime is ubiquitous and finds itself inserted into Syrian communities in many different ways. "Syria's Christians and other minority groups are caught between their parallel fears of violent change and of being associated with Assad's crackdown" (Sharp, Blanchard 2012 p.1). While Christians are another large minority group, they have benefited under the Assad regime. Kurds still view themselves as 'Kurds' rather than 'Arabs' and have a long standing history of being oppressed by the government in power. Their stakes in the conflict vary depending upon which village is asked. Minority groups are often used by the regime as well as the rebel forces to elicit support, which is a classic insurgency methodology.

A few examples of the sectarian tensions that exist can be viewed through cities such as Qatana and Latakia. The town of Qatana serves as a mini case study because it is indicative of the initial fears felt by most minority groups. During July of 2011, a large gun battle took place between security forces (Alawite youths fought alongside security forces) and Sunni Muslims over a two week period (Starr 2012 p.50). As protest movements grew later in the month, looting began in the streets. Many local shops and business were destroyed. The local Christian businesses were lined with graffiti which read 'You're next' (Starr 2012 p.52). In this case, the Christians were happy when the army broke through the city in the middle of July and provided protection against Sunni resistance groups (Starr 2012 p.52). On the other hand, Kurds who had also been targeted by pro-government forces as well anti-government forces felt that Arabs—no matter what side they were on—did not care about killing them, which caused a majority of the population to leave the town (Starr 2012 p.52). Qatana is no longer safe for any group unless they are fighting either alongside the rebels or the government.

The other mini case study is the recent case of Latakia, which is considered the last strong hold of the Assad regime. The city sits along the Mediterranean Sea, and is considered part of the Assad family homeland. Insurgent groups have been able to take over eight Alawite villages around the city since October 2012 (The Economist Nov.3rd 2012 Middle East). Citizens from villages all over Syria have grouped themselves among their own sectarian lines, which has further increased animosity toward other sectarian groups. Local Alawites fear the rebels because of revenge killings for what the government has done. Many have gone into hiding due to a rise in the religiosity of the rebels (The Economist Nov.3rd 2012 Middle East). A number of Alawites have attempted to cut all ties with regime and form their own rebel groups to protect their local villages. They feel abandoned as well as betrayed by the government because of the lack of protection they have received for their homes (The Economist Nov.3rd 2012 Middle East). "Alawite communities are also feeling the effects of the death of their local brothers/tribesmen due to the amount of Alawites killed serving the regimes military" (The Economist Nov.3rd 2012 Middle East).

It is important to realize that many groups, whether sectarian or regionally based, have competing interests in the uprising. Both the government and rebel forces have attempted to play each side off of one another as fighting has become increasingly violent in local communities.

This is the main reason Assad hired the Shabiha gang to fight alongside the security forces. If the government is able to create a situation where these groups can no longer live without an effective state apparatus, they will be forced to support the government. The sectarian divides in Syria are exploited by the regime because they give the government the best chance of gaining more support. Religion is a very sensitive subject in the region and many people do not often know their neighbors' religious affiliations. Historical identity goes back thousands of years, and many groups have a shared history that affects their view of the situation today. The rebels, on the other hand, have not done the best job of gaining public support because they are feared just as much as the regime. The anti-government rebels have been as destructive as pro-government militia groups.

While fighting grows in cities such as Alleppo, Latakia and Qatana, the sectarian divides continue to grow, further hindering a cease-fire agreement. The more the conflict continues, the more entrenched in society it will become. Intangible effects of the conflict—such as large scale human rights atrocities—will not allow for quick solutions. Even if a full cease-fire agreement is reached by both sides, the atrocities committed during the conflict could have long term effects on the reconciliation process.

U.S. Policy Options

Many assume that since the U.S. got involved in Libya, coalition forces will eventually insert themselves into Syria. In mid-2012, the United Nations brokered a peace agreement with regime forces and affiliated FSA members to enforce a cease-fire. Both sides broke the cease-fire within a few days. Syria has become such a complex issue; any policy options have much larger ramifications than many have accounted for. One State Department official was quoted as saying, "The U.S. is in the land of bad options, we just have to choose one" (Sanger, 2012 audio). Besides having an ambiguous idea of the rebel movement, the United States also has to look at the concerns surrounding intervention. Unlike Libya, Syria is a functioning state with a large scale security apparatus and military force that exists to serve the regime. An intervention will likely exacerbate regional tensions with Iran, as well as Russia and China who have twice vetoed a UN resolution on intervention. Any work toward intervention will have to involve smart diplomacy, utilizing the regional power of Russia (Zakaria 2012 p.24). It will also involve confronting Iran, as Iran has been supplying the Assad regime with both weapons and man-power to help bolster their relationship in the region.

When you ask why the United States does not get involved in Syria, you have to consider what any foreign policy specialist answers when asked what should guide U.S. actions overseas. The answer is 'national interest' (Rothkof 2005 p.4). The U.S. has introduced one bottom line for intervention: the use of chemical weapons. Through one paradigm, the United States' main concern is regional stability. Michael Clark, the director of the Royal United Services Institute, a think-tank in London, was quoted as saying that "the scale of suffering and stability of neighboring countries is causing the idea of intervention to move toward us" (The Economist Sep. 2012 p.1). It has been estimated that the number of internally displaced people has reached nearly 1.2 million (The Economist Sep.2012 p.1). Many civilians are moving toward the refugee camps along the Turkish-Syrian border while others are heading into Jordan. Turkey was also involved in an intense exchange of artillery fire in mid-September, due to Syrian munitions hitting Turkish soldiers. These are the type of actions that can cause a regional war to breakout in such a tense environment. There is no debate that the Syrian government and the rebels need to

come to a mutual agreement before their actions fully engulf neighboring countries. The United States is looking to find a policy option within the overall context of the region.

Humanitarian Crises/Complex Emergency and Intervention Options

"As of early July 2012, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition watchdog group based in the UK, estimates more than 11,486 civilians have been killed in Syria since the government's crackdown began, with nearly 17,000 killed overall" (Haggerty 2012 p.9). International watchdog groups have been monitoring the conflict since the protests started in February 2011. From what the Red Crescent and the International Crises group have estimated, nearly 1.5 million people need assistance in obtaining food and water (Haggerty 2012 p.11). The refugee numbers continue to grow as people escape to neighboring countries. According to the United Nations, 90,000 civilians have been internally displaced (IDP) to countries such as Turkey and Jordan (New York: United Nations, June 28, 2012 p.1-7).

The idea of intervention is fraught with difficulties and will continue to be the subject of debate. If the U.S. does decide to intervene, it will have to do so outside of UN authority. According to the UN Chapter VII articles 39, 40, 41, and 42 which state, "Should the Security Council consider that measures provided for in Article 41—intervention utilizing non-lethal measures—would be inadequate or have provided to be inadequate, it may take such action by air, sea or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security. Such action may include demonstrations, blockade, and other operations by air, sea, or land forces of members of the United Nations" (Charter of The United Nations p.1). The U.S. may decide to review Article 41 to help them provide legal precedence for action. Another option for the United States is to look toward NATO to see what options the regional organizations may provide. Under Article IV of the NATO charter it states, "The Parties will consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the parties is threatened" (NATO Charter Yale.edu). Turkey has recently been involved in a back and forth shelling exchange with Syrian government forces which could provide the United States with the legal reasoning for intervention under Article V's provisions for defense (Deyoung, Sly 2012 p.2). "An armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all," and in the name of collective security this may be an option the U.S. looks to consider in the future (NATO Charter Yale.edu). The U.S. has acted unilaterally before in order to secure its security interests and it will utilize this option if necessary. Within the National Security Strategy released by President Obama in May of 2010, the United States will, "reserve the right to act unilaterally if necessary to defend our nation and our interests" (NSS 2010 p.22). If the United States truly feels that there is an urgent need to operate outside international law in order to bring down the Assad government, it will work around the United Nations. For example, the U.S. has operated outside international law before— Kosovo in the 1990s and Korea in 1959 (Economist Middle East and Africa Aug 2012).

Removing Bashar al-Assad through intervention will be a difficult policy option to ferment. If the United States was to intervene, it would be under the guise of human rights, NATO security and securing vital interests in the region—chemical weapons. Although the human rights atrocities have been significant, Syria is still viewed as a sovereign nation dealing with domestic issues. This provides little wiggle room when it comes to intervention. The U.S. has proven in the past, such as its intervention in Libya, that it will intervene in a country to support democracy and humanitarian rights. Although Libya may be looked at as a reasonable

case study to model intervention, Syria brings a new set of circumstances, many of which are unknown. If a humanitarian operation were to take shape, there would need to be a massive air campaign conducted by U.S. forces in order to facilitate this type of intervention (Haggerty 2012 p.2).

Some barriers toward intervention may include the Syrian security apparatus. While the United States maintains a military hegemony in the world, the Syrian military is still a formidable opponent. In 2007, Israel was able to preventively destroy a nuclear reactor in the Syrian city of Deir al-Zour without risking a large scale military retaliation. The Israelis used a cyber-attack to disable Syrian defenses and struck the facility with precision-guided weapons. If the United States decides to launch an attack, it may not be as easy. Any decision made to intervene will have unwanted consequences; the goal is to find the best option. The Economist ran a war game scenario in the summer of 2012, analyzing what an intervention into Syria for humanitarian purposes might look like for U.S. officials. From what they found, coupled with research done by Brian Haggerty of MIT's Security Studies, Syrian air defense would be the most challenging road block to intervention (The Economist, Middle East and Africa Aug.2012 p.1). "Achieving air superiority would involve undertaking an offensive air mission to destroy, disrupt, or degrade Syrian air capabilities" (Haggerty 2012 p.23). If the United States does decide to use its air power, it would mean a full scale operation involving all aspects of the American military.

Syria is equipped with modern Russian air defense systems that are capable of causing massive damage to U.S. war planes (The Economist Middle East and Africa Aug 2012 p.4). Syria has SA22 surface to air missiles and anti-aircraft weapons (Haggerty 2012 p.24). The regime also has a large supply of stinger missiles, SCUDD missiles and MANPADs (The Economist Middle East and Africa 2012 p.4). A mission by NATO forces—or a unilateral strike by the U.S—will estimate striking around 450 targets including 150 SAM sights, 205 aircraft shelters, and 27 surface missile batteries along with 12 anti-ship cruise missiles (Haggerty 2012 p. 42). The operation will also require around 750 cruise missiles to dismantle other military sites inside the country and allied fighter planes flying around the clock in order to deter any retaliation from Syrian forces (Haggerty 2012 p. 42). The U.S. would also need 200 strike aircraft for support and a naval fleet to be located in the Mediterranean in order to sustain the operation (The Economist Middle East and Africa 2012 p.4).

Overall, the operation could be accomplished with a full commitment from the U.S. military. NATO security and humanitarian intervention could provide the cover for this operation, but in terms of strategic interest, a full air strike on the country leaves little room for options in the future. A rebuilding effort will need to be sustained as well as a large scale commitment to the region. The rising jihadist insurgency within the country could also become a problem for allied forces as well. Once the government is gone, groups operating in the region are going to turn their aggression toward someone. More western influence in the region may result in a protracted engagement for U.S. forces, which is not something the United States can afford to risk.

Rebel Funding

Another option the U.S. continues to explore is funding rebel groups. In terms of U.S. policy, the coordination of logistical support has already started. According to the Washington Post, the United States has indirectly already begun providing support for the insurgency

movement. "The administration has expanded contacts with opposition military forces to provide the Gulf Nations with assessments of rebel credibility and command-and-control infrastructure" (Deyoung, Sly 2012 p.1). Through conduits in the Middle East, the U.S. is attempting to shape the conflict in their own favor. Gulf Nations have their own agenda and will provide weapons and support for rebel forces regardless of the United States or not.

External support from Gulf States have funneled into the region since the rebellion began. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, and Jordan have all been funding the rebel movement trying to shift the power dynamic of the conflict. "Increased monetary and logistical support for the Syrian insurgency has improved rebel effectiveness and thus contributed to the creation of de-facto safe zones that have challenged the Assad regime's control of Syria" (Holiday 2012 p.30). Many Gulf States have security interests in seeing Bashar al-Assad's regime fall. These are Sunni governed states that would like to see a Sunni majority government take control of Syria. The growing security concern over Iran as a regional power is causing many Gulf States to look at the current internal conflict in Syria as a regional problem. Gulf state interests rest in securing a geo-political balance that favors Sunni backed regimes rather than Shia states. Iran is a regional hegemon, and if an Assad government emerges from this conflict, ties between both Shia states will grow stronger.

The problem with funding rebel forces is the unknown factor. As stated previously, the rebel movement is extremely de-centralized. Although attempts have been made at homogenizing the movement, the majority of rebels still act autonomously. Weapons, logistical support, and ammunition could easily fall into the hands of fundamentalists. As some reports show, the FSA and regional affiliates are already working with fundamentalist groups to achieve strategic success against the Syrian regime. The rebels are becoming more efficient and more effective due to outside funding. The caveat is that these weapons have the potential to fall into the wrong hands. According to CNN, groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra are attracting more fighters—by the thousands—because they are well trained and better funded than the FSA (Lister 2012 p.1). If this is the case, the United States must consider its options carefully. Jabhat al-Nursra is a terrorist organization. They take part in suicide bombings and promoting a maximalist agenda—change the political ideology of a country. This would be and is counterproductive to the United States War on Terrorism. Providing funds as well as logistical support to the FSA directly supports terrorist activity.

The International Crises group (2012) released a report on the growing extremism within Syria which they argue is growing due to the lack of coordinated efforts by the international community.

> "For as long as different countries sponsor distinct armed groups, a bidding war will ensue, and any hope of coordinating the rebels, disciplining them and restraining their most extremist members will be in vain. The issue, in other words, is not so much whether to arm them – and, if so, with what – but rather to rationalize and coordinate the support provided to the opposition in order to make more likely the emergence of a more coherent, structured, representative and thus effective interlocutor in what, sooner or later, must be a negotiated outcome (pg.1)."

The problem associated with this type of thinking is a lack of understanding of the ground environment. No matter how the United States attempts to strategically communicate their goals in Syria, extremist groups will always look to divide and conquer. The Syrian

government does the same by utilizing its own para-military groups—the Shabiha—to promote unrest among sectarian groups. The Syrian opposition is divided and will remain that way regardless of logistical and armed support. As displayed earlier in this paper, the conflict has historical roots. While this is an organic protests movement, certain groups within the opposition do not want to hedge their bets. People are forming along sectarian lines (*ja-bahat*) for safe refuge against the violence. These are classic tribal tactics. Most people are beginning to drop the idea of a national identity and revert to their regional or cultural identity, which could become a barrier to finding a solution. It is important to recognize that all groups have their own agenda when it comes to securing their tribal interests. Syrians can be united when they want to be, but this conflict has proven that at the basic level people will always revert back to their tribal identities in order to maintain security. Funding may exacerbate ethnic tensions, further elevating groups over one another.

Regional Stability

Lastly, one must also consider the regional implications of the Syrian conflict in terms of geo-political security. Russia has a strategic alliance with Syria that exists not only as a financial asset but a military one as well. Their base in Tartus is the only remaining naval facility from the former Soviet Union, which the government is looking to expand to host large naval vessels (Haggerty 2012 p.18). Russia has blocked two UN resolutions to intervene in Syria and it is unlikely their stance on the situation will change. In February 2012, a double veto by Russia and China of a United Nations Security Council resolution demanding the Syrian government put an immediate end to violence, withdraw its military forces from cities and towns, and allow for humanitarian access, exemplified the Russian view of the conflict (Haggerty 2012 p.2). Russia does hold influence in the region as the biggest contributor of arms sales and they will attempt to shape the region in their own national interests. Russia can also provide the United States with leverage. If the U.S. can work with Russia to help ensure that a transition is made that can be mutually acceptable to both countries national interests, it will help end the violence. Russia does hold influence, which means that it can help end the conflict, but the U.S. has to provide incentives for the Russian government to accept. As Fareed Zakaria points out in his article on Syria and Russia's relationship, Russia's ties with the Syrian army are very tight; the U.S. can use this relationship to their advantage. By working alongside Russia, the U.S. could offer to "preserve the military in some form if they assisted in dislodging the regime and moving to a democratic framework" (Zakaria 2012 p.24). The U.S. could also look to help Russia secure its borders along the Caucuses region by assisting the country in their counter-terrorism operations in Chechnya.

The United States will also have to curtail the rising influence of Iran. Syria and Iran are close allies because of their Shia orientation. Many Gulf States see this alliance as problematic because it directly conflicts with most Sunni states who view Iran as hostile. According to the Center for the New American Security, minimizing the influence of Iran is one of the largest security concerns for the United States (Dalton 2012 p.2). This could severely impact Iran's influence in Lebanon with regards to Hezbollah and Palestine's militia groups operating to destabilize Israel. Hezbollah is already funding the Shabiha which is operating under the direction of the Syrian government to cause sectarian violence. They are considered the insurance plan if the Assad regime does fall. They could launch a counter to the rebel movement causing further destabilization in the country if a new government is ever established. Iran funds

Hezbollah which allows funding to funnel through to the Shabiha and the Syrian government. As shown previously, the sectarian divisions that exist in Syria are fragile; if the Shabiha is able to further divide groups among sectarian lines the insurgency could become far more brutal. If the Assad regime does fall, Iran loses a strategic partnership with another Middle Eastern state, severely hindering its relationship with Hezbollah. "A new Syrian government could be less friendly to Iran and constrain Iran's ability to re-supply Hezbollah" (Dalton 2012 p.2).

The relationship between Syria and Iran is exacerbating tensions with the U.S. It has been reported that Iranian military units are being sent over to Syria—through Iraqi airspace—in order to assist the Assad government in counter-insurgency operations. The U.S. will want to limit Iranian influence in the region as much as possible. This could cause Iran to further strengthen its initiatives to obtain a nuclear weapon, but if the Syrian government is replaced with more western oriented leadership it decreases Iranian regional power (Dalton 2012 p.2).

Future Projections

As the insurgency worsens, the level of retaliation from the government is becoming amplified in desperation. The regime has pushed the conflict in the direction of civil war by employing brutal tactics. For the international community, there is no clear option. Peace-keeping and stability operations can only exist if two groups are willing to negotiate a cease-fire. This option has been exhausted and proven thus far to be ineffective. In order to solve this conflict there must be mutual understanding. Both parties must be able to identify the issues that drive the reasons for the conflict. All the underlining causes, such as inequality among sectarian groups, religious status and socioeconomic inequalities, must be identified. If the United States wants to solve this conflict, they need to be able to identify and work with intermediaries on both sides. Through intermediaries they can offer incentives to both parties in order to facilitate dialogue for a negation process. The conflict will get to a point where improved communication between both the government and the rebels can transform the conflict past the kinetic stage. The SNC and the FSA are operating as the main conduits through which the insurgency articulates interests, but again the problem goes back to the fractious nature of the rebellion. There is still infighting over whom and what government apparatus should administer liberated towns and villages (The Economist Middle East and Africa Nov.10th 2012 p.49). If the U.S. decides to intervene, it will have to be able to identify and find communities willing to work with them.

A new blue print formulated in Doha, Qatar's capital, offers a glimmer of hope. It was recently announced that the Syrian National Initiative was launched ushering a new diplomatic body under the direction of ex-Syrian Parliament member Riad seif (The Economist Middle East and Africa Nov.10th 2012 p.49). This new body looks to include young leaders on the ground who can help plan for a political transformation. The group will be comprised of 50 members and look to articulate interests from groups all over Syria who are fighting against the regime.

All conflicts eventually get resolved. Syria is getting to a point where a natural transformation will take place due to conflict fatigue. The Syrian government has lost thousands of troops, and the reputation of the Assad family has been tarnished. Rebel fighters have been engaged with government forces for a year and half. While gains are made, it is clear that no group has the upper hand. The government has been able to use superior air power to limit the advances of rebel forces, but guerilla tactics have been effective at countering the superior force. It seems both sides have been willing to accept cease-fires—although each time they have been broken—which demonstrates their ability to accept a negotiated solution. If a more

comprehensive plan is formulated, possibly utilizing the Syrian National Initiative and moderate members of the Syrian government and the FSA, an agreement that mutually benefits every party could be brokered. According to the Economist, there have been three diplomatic initiatives so far led by a diverse group including the Arab League, Egypt and the United Nations. Egypt has attempted to act a mediator to facilitate negotiations. If the United States wants to work with regional partners it is an option that both the Syrian government and rebel forces will soon have to accept as this war becomes more acute.

If the United States feels it is in their strategic national security interests to get involved in Syria, there are a few issues that need to be addressed. First of all, the United States needs to recognize its current financial concerns and take those into consideration when formulating a policy. The U.S. is living in a new age of austerity and this means finding solutions to problems that are cost efficient. Regional organizations provide a viable solution to securing allies as well as helping countries manage the refugee crises. Working with Turkey to implement a buffer zone along the border and implementing a Patriot Missile System to stop the bombing of civilians could act as a strong wake-up call to the Syrian government. It could also spark more insecurity from the Syrian government causing them to become more hostile to Turkey, further escalating the conflict. At this point, the United States wants to secure its allies and contain the violence.

Syria will continue to fight internally even if international forces attempt to mitigate the damage. The U.S. best course of action will be to work through Russia and China in hopes that their influence over Syria will help provide leverage in negotiating a settlement to the conflict. If a decision is made to fully support rebel forces it will have to be made soon. There are certain military brigades on the ground who are secular and do reject the notion of Jihadist in battle, but it is clear that the insurgency is growing more religious. Funding rebel operations will result in future blow back. This scenario has played out multiple times in history—Afghanistan, Africa and South America—which has resulted in security concerns for the United States. If it is deemed necessary by U.S. intelligence services, then a full weapons program needs to be implemented in order to give the rebels the best chance of success against the regime. At this point I would advise against this because of the lack of command and control the FSA has over the rebel movement.

The other concern is limiting the rise of irregular challenges coming from Syria. In order to promote a strategic environment conducive to U.S. security, Syria has to become a stable nation. As of the current moment, there are numerous rebel groups operating within the country and the United States would be unwise to support any one group. Irregular conflict and asymmetric warfare will be a part of U.S. national security concerns for the near future. A facilitation of weapons and arms to rebel groups who have ideologies counter to the United States will only result in failed policy. The chances of any one of these groups gaining power (Jabhat al-Nusra or al-Qaeda) is a real possibility. Syria is on the verge of becoming a failed state, lacking any chance of political governance. If the war does not take a turn for the better, the United States will have little options; the last thing the U.S wants to do is facilitate a failed state where warring factions are in competition for power. The best option is to stay aloof and work through the regional organizations already established in hopes that negotiated agreement can be reached. The U.S. must also stop facilitating logistical support to rebel groups unless these groups are fully identified and profiled to not have connections with jihadist organizations.

A post-Assad government is the real concern of the United States. Although intervention may look like a good option by some policy makers, the U.S. can achieve its goal in limiting Syria by working through Russia. If Russia can be seen as supporting the United States and

helping remove Assad, Iran will have limited allies in the region. If the United States maintains a close eye on the situations, and secures its allies by working through NATO to provide logistical support to help the facilitation of refugees, it will help quell some of the humanitarian crises.

The conflict in Syria must remain internal. If the United States can assist the refugee crises, it will be choosing a policy that secures its own interests and limits intermediary damage. International engagement with Russia will provide the best option to facilitate negotiations with Bashar al Assad. Egypt—as any newly elected government—is trying to act as an intermediary in the conflict as well. If the regional power holders around Syria, such as Egypt and the Arab League, can foster a cease-fire that works for both the rebels and the government, then there is a chance for short term relief. Long term resolution may be harder to foster. With so many people killed, there is little hope that violence in the region will end after a cease-fire. There have been many people left homeless, disabled and killed during the past year of fighting that any agreement could be met with resistance. People are going to want retribution for their losses. The retributive nature of violence must end in order to promote conflict resolution. If the new government—whoever that may be—can promote reconciliation among sectarian group and rally the country around Syrian nationalism, the country may have a chance at stability. The only issue is what happens to the jihadist groups? What happens if they attempt to gain power in the absence of a stable government? This is a real possibility as the war progresses and religion becomes more seminal to the rebel movement. It will be on the Syrian people to take care of this issue. It is obvious that Syria has lived for years without religious influence in government. Their governing structure supports the idea of secularism. The end goal for the United States is to support stability and limit revisionism. Syria allows for no good options. Supporting international sovereignty and allowing the conflict to evolve may be the only solution at this point. There are risks to every decision. With any operational plan there needs to be room for assessment and re-thinking. The future of Syria will not be in the hands of the United States, but rather, the Syrian people.

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