

# Syria: Why Its Future Matters to More Than the Middle East



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Syria is currently in a state of civil war, and the conflict in that country is only likely to become worse, potentially leading to the overthrow of that country's government. Syria is also an important regional player in the Middle East, and the ongoing instability in that country has significant implications for other countries in the region and for America's regional interests.

In order to understand the current conflict, its regional implications and how it is likely to play out, we first need to understand the context in which the country operates as well as the nature of the country. Accordingly, this backgrounder will review the history leading up to Syria's establishment as an independent country and explore the diversity within the nation as it pertains to the political landscape. From there, we'll explore how unfolding politics in the area – from takeovers of Syria to Syria's alliances with Iran – have affected Syria's position and image in the Arab World and beyond. Finally, we'll examine what its current civil war (and potential outcomes) means for the United States and the world at large.

## **The Origins of Modern Syria**

Syria is an ancient land that has played host to a large number of diverse civilizations over at least five millennia. In fact, modern Syria's capital city, Damascus, is believed to be one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Much of Syria lies within what historians refer to as the Fertile Crescent, an arc of agriculturally rich territory that begins in Iraq and stretches northward into parts of Turkey before curving back into western Syria, Lebanon, western Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian territories. With the exception of Egypt and parts of modern day Iran, all the major ancient Middle Eastern civilizations arose from the Fertile Crescent area. Syria also lies astride major ancient north-south routes along the eastern Mediterranean and thus was strategically important to those who wished to dominate the Fertile Crescent area. Accordingly, the list of Syria's conquerors is very long and includes the Hebrews, the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Hittites, the Egyptians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Byzantines, the Arabs, the Crusaders, the Mongols, the Mamluks, the Ottomans, the British and the French.



Despite its ancient pedigree, Syria was no more than a geographic term until the establishment of the French Mandate of Syria in 1920. Somewhat ironically, it was the European powers rather than the Syrians themselves who, during the First World War, drew up the boundaries of Syria and thus created the basis for the country.

Syria includes very diverse geographic regions. The country, which is about the size of North Dakota, is bordered by mountains to the north and southwest, and its long eastern border with Iraq and most of the interior of the country is desert. Not surprisingly, most of the population lives in the more fertile areas in the west of the country, which receives moisture from winter rains coming from the Mediterranean. The only other major source of water is the Euphrates River, which cuts across the northeast of the country. This means that not only does the vast majority of Syria's population live near its borders with Turkey, Lebanon and Israel (this area includes Syria's capital, Damascus, and its second major city, Aleppo), but also that its industry and agricultural production are concentrated in the west. This makes the country very vulnerable strategically.

As with its geography, Syria's population is also diverse. Ninety percent of the population is Arab (meaning that they speak Arabic as their native tongue and identify themselves as Arabs), but the Arab population is divided along religious lines. In the Middle East, religion is not just a reflection of one's beliefs, but a community into which one is born and identifies with – regardless of how much or how little personal faith one has. The majority of the Arabs are Sunni Muslims; but approximately 12 percent of the Arab population identifies as Alawi, about 10 percent are Christian and three percent are Druze. Among the non-Arab population, the largest community is the Kurds (about nine percent of the country's overall population).<sup>1</sup>

Syria was conquered by the Turkish Ottoman Empire in 1517 and was thereafter ruled from the Ottoman capital in Turkey, Istanbul (formerly Constantinople), until the territory was conquered by the British army in 1917. For centuries, the Ottomans ruled most of the Arab World (from Algeria to Iraq), but by the end of the 19th century, North Africa was ruled by European colonial powers, and the territory of the Empire was reduced to Turkey and the area between the Mediterranean and Red Seas on one side and the Iranian border on the other. The fact that the Ottoman rulers, who were Turks, ruled over Arabs in the Arab part of the Empire was not usually a problem (until the 19<sup>th</sup> century), because the Ottoman Empire was a Sunni Muslim Empire that ruled in the name of Islam. (For the last several centuries of the Empire's existence, Ottoman sultans also claimed the title of the successor to the Prophet Muhammad – Caliph.) However, by the late 19th century, some Arab intellectuals, influenced by the rise of nationalist movements in Europe, were fostering nationalistic ideas of their own. They argued for Arabs' right to determine their own fate through the creation of an independent Arab state that would represent and rule over all Arabs. It is



important to note that the Turkish elites in the Empire were also gradually becoming more nationalistic; thus helping fuel Arab disenchantment with being part of what seemed to be becoming a Turkish Empire, rather than an Islamic one.

After the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the Ottomans allied themselves with Germany and Austria-Hungary, thus joining what turned out to be the losing side of the war. This made them the enemies of Britain and France and eventually led to the British army invading the Ottoman Empire from its bases in Egypt. By 1918, the Ottomans had not only been pushed out of their Arab lands, but the Empire itself was on the verge of collapse. It eventually disappeared in 1922 with the creation of the modern Turkish Republic.

During most of 1917, Britain's effort to drive the Ottomans out of the Empire's Arab lands was assisted by guerrilla warfare on the part of various nomadic or semi-nomadic Arab clans based in what is today Saudi Arabia. These clans tied down Ottoman divisions, cut strategic rail lines and generally caused significant disruption to the Ottoman war effort. As an inducement to make these clans wage war against the Ottomans, the British promised the most prominent clan, the Hashemites, leadership of an Arab state to be founded on the Ottoman Empire's Arab territories. Unfortunately for the Hashemites and their allies, the British never had any intention of turning over these conquered lands to an Arab clan. Instead, the British secretly agreed to divide the Arab territories conquered from the Ottomans between themselves and their French allies. Britain would have probably been happy to control all these lands itself, but it needed France, both to fight in World War I and also to make sure that Germany would remain isolated and weak after the war was over. Consequently, an agreement was reached whereby France would get Syria and Lebanon, and the British would get Iraq and Palestine - the borders of which initially included modern-day Israel, Jordan, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Since outright colonialism was no longer politically correct by this period in history, the British and French secured international endorsement (via the newly created League of Nations, the precursor to today's United Nations) for a "mandate" that enabled them to rule these territories until such time as the local populations were able to rule themselves. This meant the British and French would be the ones to judge when the locals would be ready for independence.

Consequently, the Syrian state was initially created as the French Mandate of Syria. And although the geographic term "Syria" encompassed an area far larger than the boundaries of the Syrian state, Syria did not have a history as an independent country. And since Syrians were also Arabs, it meant Syrians who were opposed to French rule were Arab nationalists rather than Syrian nationalists. Their goal was to expel the British, French and other European colonial powers from the Middle East and North Africa and to unite



all the Arab lands from Morocco to Iraq in one independent Arab state. This goal was based on the argument that, since all Arabs shared the same language and culture (which may or may not be true depending on one's definitions of spoken language and culture), they constituted one nation that deserved its own independent state.

### **A Country of Multiple Identities**

This form of nationalism was also known as pan-Arabism, because it focused on uniting all the Arab peoples divided by colonial borders. The concept of pan-Arabism survived for several decades and was highly popular, but it proved impossible to truly unite Arabs into one country. Some Arab societies, and Egypt is probably the best example of this, had their own history of being independent that not only pre-dated the creation of European colonies in the Middle East, but also predated the rise of Islam and the Arab conquest of the Middle East – meaning they had a much firmer basis for developing a separate identity. Syrians, on the other hand, never really thought of themselves as Syrian because that concept did not really exist. Instead, they focused on their Arab identity, something they shared with others in the region.

Consequently, Syrians under French rule focused on getting the French out and uniting Syria with other Arab lands in a common Arab nation-state. In fact, many years after achieving independence, Syria briefly united with Egypt (1958 to 1961) to create a common country: the United Arab Republic. This union collapsed after less than four years chiefly because the Egyptians treated Syria as a colony of Egypt rather than as an equal partner.

After the outbreak of the Second World War and the conquest of France by Nazi Germany in 1940, French overseas territories came under the rule of the French collaborationist government in Vichy, and these lands thus became enemy territory as far as the Allies were concerned. In 1941, the British, along with their Free-French allies, conquered Syria and Lebanon. The British promised the people in these colonies they would be granted independence, and these two countries achieved full independence upon the withdrawal of all French forces in 1946. Both countries consisted of a jumble of different ethnic and religious groups, so most Syrians had no real sense of why an independent Syrian state should exist as opposed to an independent Arab state encompassing additional Arab lands. To further complicate matters, under French rule, certain minority groups like the Alawis and the Druze had been given important positions of leadership in the French-run military and government administration. As a result, they were better-placed to dominate the country's Sunni Muslim majority after gaining independence.

After a short period of a corrupt and unstable democratic government, and after the Syrian military's defeat at the hands of the newly created State of Israel during that country's War of Independence, a Syrian



colonel named Husni al-Zaim staged a coup d'état (military takeover) of Syria. Between 1949 and 1963, Syria was ruled by a series of military dictators until another coup in March 1963 that brought Hafez al-Assad and his Ba'ath (renaissance) Party to power. That regime has remained in power to this day and is led by Hafez al-Assad's son, Bashar al-Assad, who replaced his father after his death in 2000. The Assad regime was dominated by the President's Alawi ethnic and religious community in alliance with other minority groups, such as the Druze and Christian communities.

Since Syria was now directly ruled by minority groups, the regime became an even stronger proponent of pan-Arabism. It did this, in part, so these minority groups could theoretically be considered legitimate leaders of the country by the Sunni Muslim majority. The regime's intention was to portray themselves as Arabs fighting for a united Arab state where one's ethnic or religious background would not matter (as long as one was a proud Arab), as opposed to members of minority groups dominating Syria's majority population. This was also one of the reasons Syria saw itself as a leader in the struggle against Israel. Israel's existence was seen as an obstacle to the unification of the Arabs, so being an enemy of Israel made Arab leaders appear more legitimate and popular among their people.

The regime created by Hafez al-Assad and then bequeathed to his son Bashar, the current leader of the country, is based on firm control of the military. From the beginning, lower-ranking officers were shifted from one command to another in quick succession to prevent a loyal base of soldiers from forming that might follow these lower-ranking officers in a coup attempt. Senior officers were given virtually no direct control over lower-ranking officers so senior officers would be unable to effectively command larger forces and thus challenge the regime. The Assad regime also encouraged competition between officers, thereby making it difficult for army officers to form alliances with each other. All of these measures proved very effective in preventing challenges to the regime from the army, but they came at a price – they made the Syrian army weak and militarily ineffective. The Ba'ath Party, which ostensibly ruled Syria, was in fact an empty shell, and the regime was primarily dependent on the support of the Alawi community whose members were put in key positions in the military, along with other minority groups. The most senior and sensitive positions were given to Hafez al-Assad's family members, followed by other members of his tribe, before moving down the totem pole to other members of his Alawi ethnic community. Thus, the regime relied on the loyalty of its family, tribe and ethnic community for its continued existence, and it leveraged the fear that other ethnic-religious minorities had of the collapse of Assad's rule and the rise of the Sunni majority. Over the years, the regime was also able to co-opt prominent Sunnis, particularly in the business community, who benefited from the Assad regime.



## The Problem With Pan-Arabism

Before the Assad regime came into power, a series of events occurred to affect the prospects of pan-Arabism as a viable ideology. By the 1950s, the ideas of pan-Arabism were not only appealing to the Syrian masses, but also to the majority of people across the Arab world. The person most identified with the pan-Arab ideal was not a Syrian, but an Egyptian. Gamal Abdul Nasser was an Egyptian colonel who, along with a group of colleagues, banded together in an organization called the Free Officers, overthrew Egypt's monarchy in 1952. Just as we see today, political changes in Egypt have a huge impact across the Arab World because of Egypt's leadership role in the region. Nasser was a big proponent of pan-Arabism and viewed Egypt as the natural center of a pan-Arab state with himself as the natural leader. Between the mid-1950s and the time of Arab defeat in the Six Day War of 1967, the highly-charismatic Nasser was viewed by many Arabs in near-messianic terms. He was seen as the leader who was going to unite the Arabs, destroy the last vestiges of European colonialism – including the existence of separate and independent Arab states – and make of the Arabs a great nation once again. Photos of Nasser hung in living rooms of Arab families from Morocco to Iraq.

Nasser essentially saw two barriers to realizing his dream of Arab unification. First was his rivals among the leaders of the other Arab countries – particularly the monarchies of the Persian Gulf led by Saudi Arabia and Iraq, which did not dream of a pan-Arab state under Nasser's leadership. Second was the State of Israel between the North African and Asian parts of the Arab World (the geographic heart of the region), which was viewed as an illegitimate country created on Arab land. Nasser first resolved to take on Israel and began earnestly building up Egypt's military power, courtesy of a large arms deal with the Soviet Union in 1955. This precipitated a chain of events that led to the 1956 Suez War (aka Sinai Campaign) and Egypt's defeat at the hands of Israel, the United Kingdom and France. Perceived as standing up for the rights of the Arabs, Nasser became even more popular after this defeat. He would need at least a decade to rebuild Egypt's military and attempt to confront Israel again. Consequently, Nasser shifted his focus to first trying to unify the Arab World and did so by attempting to undermine his rivals among the leaders of the Arab World. What followed was roughly a decade of political intrigues leading to assassinations and the overthrow of governments across the Arab World, with Nasser on one side of the battle and Saudis on the other. Governments from Syria to Iraq, and Libya to Yemen, wobbled and then collapsed as pro-Nasser military officers took power.

As noted earlier, a new Syrian regime united the country with Egypt to create the United Arab Republic in 1958, which Yemen later joined as part of a federation called the United Arab States. This union collapsed in 1961 as another coup occurred in Damascus and a new military junta, resentful of Egypt's domination of Syria and expropriation of its resources, pulled Syria out of the union. This, however, did not mean that



Syria had given up on pan-Arabism. When the Assad regime came to power in March 1963, it initially attempted to rejoin the United Arab Republic but eventually steered away and formed its own version of pan-Arabism. This version argued that the Arab World should be united under the leadership of Syria's Ba'ath party rather than Nasser's leadership. Assad and Nasser became bitter rivals, and both competed for leadership of the pan-Arab ideal.

One of the best ways to gain leadership of the pan-Arab movement was to confront Israel, an enterprise that consistently united the Arabs. Consequently, both Nasser and Assad understood they needed to challenge Israel. While Egypt, the Arab World's most militarily powerful country, was still in the process of building up its armed forces, Arabs could not take on Israel in a conventional war. Instead, they focused on what we would term today as "asymmetric conflict" – the use of guerrillas and terrorists to attack the Jewish state. In 1964, Egypt created the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in an attempt to unite Palestinian guerilla groups under Egyptian leadership. Syria followed soon thereafter, forming its own rival Palestinian faction: Al Fatah. Arab leaders realized the Palestinian issue was too politically powerful for them not to "own," so the major Arab countries formed their own Palestinian factions in the mid-1960s. Everyone understood that the Arab leader who was viewed as most supportive of the Palestinians and most willing to confront Israel would, at least in theory, gain the loyalty of the Arab people.

By 1966, the region was gearing up for war, and when it broke out in June 1967, Arabs were truly shocked that the Israeli army was able to defeat the combined armies of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon in six days. This defeat, known in Arabic as the "Naksa" (setback), essentially destroyed Nasser's last hope of unifying the Arab World under his leadership. Syrians, who were very strong on rhetoric but did little actual fighting at the outset of the war, lost territory to Israel, as did Egypt and Jordan. They retreated to a stance of implacable hatred toward Israel, while redoubling support for their Palestinian faction, Al Fatah, which was eventually able to take over leadership of the PLO (a position it maintains today).

Next, the War of Attrition between Egypt and Israel from 1967 to 1970, and the Yom Kippur War in 1973 between Israel and an Arab alliance made up primarily of Egypt and Syria took place. The Yom Kippur War caught Israel unprepared and resulted in very high casualties. It also set the stage for American leadership in the rapprochement between Egypt and Israel and the eventual signing of a 1979 peace treaty between the two countries.

### **Syria's Role in the Arab-Israeli Conflict**

By now, Syria saw itself as the only real contender for pan-Arab leadership. By the 1970s, the zeal for pan-Arabism faded across the Arab World as people tired of the political machinations of their leaders and



became more comfortable with their separate identities as Egyptians, Iraqis, Jordanians, etc. The Syrian regime continued to propound pan-Arabism and saw its role as the one to confront Israel. Viewing Egypt as having abandoned the Palestinians and the larger pan-Arab cause, Syria became the unofficial leader of the “rejectionist bloc” of Arab countries that bitterly opposed the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. Syria then embarked upon a very costly effort to replace Egypt as Israel’s main rival by obtaining huge quantities of arms designed to achieve what the Syrians referred to as “strategic parity” with Israel. Needless to say, this bankrupted the country. When Israel and Syria clashed in Lebanon during Israel’s 1982 invasion of Lebanon, the Syrian air force was badly mauled, and Syria was shown to be completely unable to block any Israeli moves. This was unfortunate for the Syrian regime because, with the total collapse of pan-Arabism by this time, the Syrian regime’s legitimacy among its own people was increasingly based on its willingness to effectively confront Israel. As long as the minority regime in Damascus could assert that it was fighting for the rights of the Palestinians and not “giving in” to Israel, it could claim at least some level of legitimacy among the people of Syria.

### **The Syrian-Iranian Link**

Because Syria held on to an official ideology that favored pan-Arabism longer than most, it was, by the end of the 1970s, an isolated country. Egypt’s president, Anwar Sadat, visited Israel in 1977, and the country launched peace talks with Israel, thereby creating a bitter rift between Cairo and the rest of the Arab World. As with Jordan, Iraq’s leadership was hostile to Syria, and the Saudis were not particularly friendly with the Syrian regime either. When revolution broke out in Iran in 1979, Iraq’s new dictator, Saddam Hussein, decided he would take advantage of the confusion. He invaded Iran and attempted to reclaim areas in the country that housed Iran’s Arab minority. These areas were, not coincidentally, also rich in oil resources. The Iraqi invasion, which began in September 1980, actually united the Iranians behind their new leadership. It also began a war known as the Iran-Iraq War, which lasted for eight years. The Iran-Iraq War involved a great deal of trench warfare with minimal military gains and extensive loss of life – and it ultimately ended in stalemate. Since the Syrian leadership feared that a clear Iraqi victory over Iran might embolden Saddam to foster a revolt in Syria or invade the country, Syria allied itself with Iran – an alliance which has remained in place ever since.

For Iran, the alliance with Syria became increasingly important because Iran was determined to export its revolutionary ideology. This ideology was based on the principle that Islamic societies should be ruled by religious scholars (Islam does not have clerics), as well as increase Iran’s influence and power within the Middle East. Then, as today, Iran aspired to be the major regional power in the Middle East. As the premier Shi’a country (Shi’a Muslims constitute 10 percent to 15 percent of the world’s Muslims; the vast majority are Sunni Muslims), Iran also saw its role as that of protecting Shi’a outside its borders and of encouraging



Sunni Muslims to adopt Shi'a beliefs and practices. The Arab World viewed Iranians with suspicion because they were neither Arab nor Sunni, so an alliance with an Arab state like Syria could suggest to others in the region that Iran had friendly intentions towards the Arabs. Iran also took up the Palestinian cause and began exhibiting staunch opposition to Israel, which served as an effective way to appeal to the Arab masses. For Syria, the alliance with Iran provided access to subsidized Iranian oil and other economic benefits. Syria looked for an Iranian victory over Iraq that would neutralize their mutual enemy, Saddam Hussein.

Syria and Iran also found a profitable venue for cooperation in Lebanon. Syria's troops had been deployed to Lebanon in the wake of the Lebanese civil war in 1975 and occupied about two-thirds of the country. After Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, Syria's troops provided increasing support to two Lebanese Shi'a organizations that were fighting the Israeli army in southern Lebanon. Of these, the most prominent organization quickly became Hezbollah. Hezbollah was dependent on Iranian arms, training and funding, and therefore acted as Iran's "long arm" in the struggle against Israel. This enabled Iran to "prove" to the Arabs that it had the region's best interests in mind and could be a loyal ally to the Palestinian cause. Through waging an ongoing and ultimately successful insurgency campaign against Israeli forces in Lebanon, Hezbollah also served Syrian interests by forcing the Israeli army to withdraw from Lebanese territory over the course of 18 years. This served to deepen Syria's influence over Lebanon. Syria served as a lynchpin in Iran's regional strategy, as Iran and Hezbollah both needed Syria as a conduit for Iranian arms and money. After the Syrian army's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, Hezbollah's role as the primary military and political force in Lebanon made it even more important for the Syrians to be closely allied with that organization, since they no longer directly controlled Lebanese territory, and Hezbollah, as noted earlier, was very closely aligned with Iran and dependent upon Iranian support.

For Syria, the downside of receiving Iran's warm embrace was that the country came to be even more isolated and viewed with even greater suspicion by the rest of the Arab World. Far from ending its isolation, the alliance with Iran only increased it. When large-scale instability emerged in Syria in March 2011, many Arab states like Saudi Arabia and Jordan began supporting the Syrian insurgents because they sought the overthrow of the Assad regime. This would, of course, bring the Syrian-Iranian alliance crashing down and thwart what they viewed as Iran's increasingly threatening footprint in the region.

### **Consequences of the Assad Regime's Collapse**

The Assad regime, which has ruled Syria since 1963, is in its death throes. No one can say what the regime's shelf-life will be, but it seems quite clear that the civil war engulfing the country will end in a



collapse of the present system. Naturally, this has profound implications for both Syria and the broader Middle East.

At the time of this writing, there have been an estimated 100,000 deaths related to the Syrian civil war, and the bloodshed is likely to continue in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the regime, since Assad and his government are essentially ethnic minorities in the country. . The new order in Syria is likely to be dominated by the majority Sunni Muslim population, and there will likely be a great deal of sectarian conflict as the majority Sunnis demand payback for the decades of domination by the Alawis and their allies. The Alawis and other minority groups will likely circle the wagons in an attempt to protect themselves. This could mean that, in the short term, Syria will fragment into groups of warring militias, each controlling a different area of the country. The Alawis, for example, will likely retreat to their traditional homeland in the mountains above Syria's Mediterranean coast. They may be able, at least for a time, to run their own mini-state until post-Assad Syria becomes less chaotic and a reconstituted Syrian army is able to reassert control over the country. In short, it will likely take quite some time for sectarian conflict to end in Syria and for the country to become stable enough to control its territory and borders and it is probably more likely that Syria will remain more of a country in name than in reality, just like it's neighbor Lebanon.

Given the expected period of quasi-anarchy and internecine conflict in post-Assad Syria, a political vacuum will develop in Syria that will undoubtedly affect the region. As with Iraq, ongoing conflict in Syria between ethnic and religious communities will provide significant opportunities for al Qaida-affiliated groups to operate in Syria and use the country as a launching pad for attacks – in this case, against neighboring Israel. According to a variety of reports coming out of Syria, al-Qaida-related groups are already operating in the country. While these groups may be focused on bringing down the Assad regime and attacking the country's religious and ethnic minorities (as al-Qaida of Mesopotamia has done so with respect to minority groups in Iraq) the opportunity to attack Israel will likely be something they won't want to pass up. An anarchic Syria that is unable to prevent attacks against Israel from its territory is likely to invite Israeli military operations on Syrian territory which could, in turn, inflame the region.

The new Syrian regime is likely to be hostile to Iran. This is partly due to the link between Syria and Iran, and partly due to Iran's staunch support of the Assad regime and reported deployment of security personnel during the civil war to defend the Assad regime and its Lebanese proxy, Hezbollah. Should Syria turn on Iran, it would be a severe blow to Iran's prestige and influence in the region. (It would, after all, lose the support of its only Arab-state ally.) Hezbollah would be cut off from its main conduit for smuggling weapons, which means if Israel and Hezbollah go to war as they did in 2006, Hezbollah could expect its arsenal of rockets and missiles to run out without an ability to restock. A Hezbollah without several tens of thousands



of weapons with which to threaten Israeli cities would essentially become a toothless organization.

## Conclusions

The collapse of the Assad regime will represent a victory for Saudi Arabia and Turkey, both of which are keen to block any Iranian attempts to gain inroads into the region. Blocking Iran's influence is also a key objective for the United States, but the collapse of the Assad regime in Syria will bring with it many new problems, even as it solves old ones. Iran's influence will be blunted and Hezbollah will be significantly weakened, which should make American policymakers happy. At the same time, al-Qaida affiliates may obtain a foothold in yet another Arab country and use that to attack Israel and destabilize both Jordan and Lebanon. As is often the case in the Middle East, the United States will be forced to choose between bad and worse. "Good" is not likely to be one of the policy outcomes.

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## Source

<sup>1</sup> US Department of State, *Background Note: Syria* (Washington, DC: Department of State, 2012), available at: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3580.htm> (accessed: June 23, 2012).

