



Syria: Conflict Diagnostic

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Executive Summary

This diagnostic report examines the recent trends in structural factors from 2011 to 2014 in comparison to the 2006 Syria Baseline Report produced by the Country Indicators for Foreign Policy (CIFP). It also examines the role of internal and external stakeholders, who have contributed to the ongoing conflict. The crucial obstacles preventing conflict resolution and stabilization in Syria are the involvement of complex regional and international actors, the sectarian character of the conflict and the resulting displacement of an estimated 10 million Syrians of their current population of 22.8 million. Despite recent attempts to negotiate a peace settlement, the continued structural deterioration and long-term impacts of the conflict have limited the potential for a resolution in the near future.

Background

Syria officially gained independence from France in 1946 and underwent a number of military coups resulting in an unstable political environment until the 1960s.¹⁸ In 1967 Syria lost ownership over the Golan Heights to Israel as a result of their defeat in the Arab-Israeli war.¹⁹ Shortly thereafter in 1970, Hafiz al-Assad who was a member of the minority Alawi group, rose to the presidency through a coup.²⁰ Following his death in 2000, Bashar al-Assad, current President of Syria, rose to power. During the Arab Spring protests in 2011, Assad used military force in order to repress the protesters and those in opposition to the regime. This violence led the international community to impose sanctions and call for Assad's immediate resignation. Negotiations for peace have been unsuccessful thus far, however, the opposition parties and the Assad regime are involved in renewed talks at the Geneva 2016 Peace Conference, which began on February 1st 2016.²¹

Primary External Stakeholders

| Country | Impact | Effects |
|--|---------------|---|
|  United States and Coalition | Mixed | (+) There has been a total of 1,169 airstrikes conducted by the US ¹ and 3,266 airstrikes conducted by the US-led coalition in Syria ² (+) Coalition has imposed sanctions leading to decline of Syria's GDP ³ (-) US President Obama has announced the end of the training program of Syrian rebel forces ⁴ |
|  Russia | Destabilizing | (+) Military intervention by Russia in support of Assad's regime (-) Blocking of UN Security Council resolutions to refer Syrian issue to ICC ⁵ |
|  Iran | Destabilizing | (-) Shia-majority Iran sent military advisors, equipment, and billions of dollars in aid, hoping to protect Iran's interests in Syria ⁶ (-) Creation of the National Defense Forces - Nearly 80,000 Alawites, Shiites, and regime loyalists who assist the Syrian army in combat |
|  Lebanon | Mixed | (+) The economic strain and instability resulting from the large influx of Syrian refugees provides Lebanon with a vested interest in stabilizing the conflict ⁷ (-) Hezbollah has played a destabilizing role in the ongoing conflict in Syria by supporting the regime forces ⁸ |
|  Turkey | Stabilizing | (+) Member of the US-led coalition to combat ISIS in Syria and Iraq ⁹ (+) Hosting over 2.5 million Syrian refugees ¹⁰ (-) Arms shipments and rebel fighters continue to cross through Turkish borders. These routes have been exploited by extremists. ¹¹ |
|  United Nations | Stabilizing | (+) UN led peace negotiations have been unsuccessful thus far, however the UN-led Geneva 2016 Peace Conference began on February 1 st 2016, bringing the opposition and Assad regime to mediation ¹² (-) Recurring vetoes and veto threats from China and Russia have prevented UNSC approved for peacekeeping and military intervention |
|  Saudi Arabia | Mixed | (+) Member of the US-led coalition calls for Assad to resign (±) Provides military and economic resources to the anti-Assad rebel forces in Syria ¹³ |

Background

| Actor | Impact | Effects |
|----------------------------|---------------|--|
| Bashar Al-Assad Government | Destabilizing | (-) Initiated crackdown on Syrian protests, resulting in conflicts that have left over 250,000 people dead. ¹ (-) Implemented policies that have left Syrians without food, water and basic necessities (-) Ongoing violence and human rights abuses against Syrian civilians by the Government's military ¹ |
| ISIS | Destabilizing | (-) Emerged in 2011 in Iraq and Syria. The subjects of the US-led coalition airstrike campaign. (-) Seeks to establish an Islamic Caliphate |
| Rebel Groups | Mixed | (+) Attempts to unify the Opposition Forces, and avoid infighting ¹⁴ (+) SDF alliance, which includes Kurd Rebels (YPG), has made recent advances into ISIS-held areas ¹⁵ (-) Continues to gain and lose territorial control against ISIS ¹⁶ and Assad ¹⁷ |

Key Indicators

| DS- Destabilizing Factors | SF – Stabilizing Factors | AS - Assessment |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Extremely High Risk | High Risk | Medium Risk |
| | | Low Risk |

History of the Armed Conflict

Deteriorating

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| D F | <p>Armed Conflict: In the 2006 CIPF baseline report, Syria was rated 1.0 for armed conflicts, meaning there was no conflict. Following Collier and Hoeffler’s definition of civil war as one where there are at least 1,000 deaths per year,²² Syria is in a full-fledged war as the UN has recently reported that the conflict in Syria caused the deaths of at least 191,369 people between the period of March 2011 and April 2014.²³ This reality demonstrates the high level of deterioration and onset of protracted conflict since 2006.</p> <p>Refugees Produced: In the CIPF baseline report from 2006, Syria received the Global Rank Score of 3.2 on number of refugees produced. The World Bank data has discovered that the number of refugees produced in Syria has increased from 19,931 in 2011 to 3,865,720 in 2014.²⁴</p> <p>Refugees Hosted: In the CIPF baseline report from 2006, Syria received a Global Rank Score of 4.4 for refugees hosted. The number of refugees hosted by Syria has declined from 1,242,391 in 2011 to 677,756 in 2014.²⁵</p> <p>Foreign Fighters: In December 2015 it was reported that there were at least 27,000 foreign fighters in Syria from 86 countries.²⁶</p> <p>Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs): The CIPF baseline report from 2006 ranked Syria 4.4 for IDPs, which demonstrated a mid range number of displaced persons. According to World Bank estimates, Syria had 598,001 IDPs in 2011,²⁷ the number increased drastically to 7.6 million in 2014.²⁸</p> |
| A S | <p>The civil war that has raged in Syria since 2011 has caused a drastic increase in refugees produced. This along with the extreme increase in IDPs is indicative of the deteriorating domestic situation in Syria. The large influx of foreign fighters to Syria is also playing a destabilizing role, which could lead to further protracted conflict.</p> |

Governance and Political Instability

Deteriorating

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| S F | <p>Regime Durability: The 2006 CIPF report ranked Syria’s regime durability a Global Rank Score of 2.4, which indicates a relatively high level of durability. Bashar al-Assad remains in power, and was re-elected in 2014 with 88.7% of the vote however, polling stations were only open in government controlled areas which caused the international community and the opposition within Syria to question the legitimacy of the elections.²⁹</p> |
| D F | <p>Level of Democracy: In the 2006 CIPF baseline report, Syria earned a Global Rank Score of 8.4 on level of democracy, meaning it was highly undemocratic. In 2011 it ranked 1.99 out of 10 on the Democracy Index indicating that it has remained extremely undemocratic,³⁰ and in 2014, their ranking further declined to 1.74.³¹ Additionally, the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) indicated an immense drop in government effectiveness from 38.39 (on a range from 0 (lowest) to 100 (highest)) in 2011, to only 6.73 in 2014.³²</p> <p>Restrictions on Civil and Political Rights: In the 2006 CIPF baseline report, Syria received a Global Rank Score of 9.0 for restrictions on civil and political rights meaning there were extremely few liberties afforded to the Syrian population. In 2011, the Freedom House ranked Syria a 6.5 (1=best, 7=worst) in freedom, 6 in civil liberties, and 7 in political rights.³³ Since 2011, Syria has earned the lowest score of 7 in every category.³⁴</p> <p>Restrictions on the Freedom of the Press: In the 2006 CIPF baseline report, Syria received a Global Rank Score of 8.0 meaning it heavily restricted the freedom of the press. Syria received an 84 (0=best, 100=worst) for freedom of the press in 2011,³⁵ however, received a score of 89 for 2014.³⁶</p> <p>Level of Corruption: The level of perceived corruption in Syria has fluctuated over the past four years. The Corruption Perceptions Index ranked Syria 26 (0=highly corrupt, 100=very clean) in 2012³⁷ and 20 in 2014.³⁸ This demonstrates that Syria has remained among the most highly corrupt countries for the past three years.</p> |
| A S | <p>The large decline in government effectiveness indicators and Syria’s worsening civil, political and press freedoms scores demonstrate a steady deterioration in the Assad regime’s governance and political stability from 2006 until 2014.</p> |

Military Militarization

Stable

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| S F | <p>Arms Imports – In 2010 there was \$167,000,000 spent on imported arms, while in 2014 that had decreased to \$100,000,000.³⁹ This shows a decrease in arms sales, which could represent the international community restricting arms transfers to Syria.⁴⁰ This does not account for unofficial imports of arms, only officially sold weapons to Syria.</p> |
| D F | <p>Military expenditure (% of central government expenditure) – CIPF in 2006 had ranked the Syrian military expenditure at 11.0. In 2013 military expenditure accounted for 16.2% of GDP and in 2014 it accounted for 13.2%. This is a relatively high expenditure in comparison to other Middle Eastern states, and thus destabilizing.</p> <p>Frontline Personnel (active soldiers) – CIPF had categorized armed forces personnel at 9.0. In 2011 there were 325,000 soldiers in the Syrian Armed Forces. In 2014 this number dropped to 178,000, due to desertion and the death of soldiers.⁴¹ Due to the volatile numbers of soldiers, this is destabilizing. Since 2006, numbers of active soldier have been declining from 7.3% of total</p> |

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| | workforce to 3.0% in 2013. ⁴² This is destabilizing due to the high volatility in the number of frontline personnel. |
| A S | This assessment considers the overall military expenditure to be a destabilizing factor. It is comparatively high to other states in the region and is volatile. There is a significant concern regarding military expenditure, however, overall militarization in 2012-2013 shows a decreasing trend from the 2006 CIFP score. |

Population Heterogeneity

Stable

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| S F | Ethnic Diversity: In the 2006 CIFP Baseline report, Syria had a score of 2.0 for ethnic diversity. The most recent data indicates 90.3% of the population can be identified as Arab, and the remaining 9.7% of the population can be classified as Kurds, Armenian or Other. ⁴³ This contributes to a low risk of ethnic rebellion , which is consistent with the CIFP rating of 3.0 in 2006. |
| D F | Religious Diversity: In the 2006 CIFP Baseline report, Syria had a score of 6.0 for religious diversity. The most recent data indicates that 87% of the population is Muslim, (73% Sunni and 13% Shia, Alawi and Ismali), 10% is Christian, 2% is Druze, in addition to a small percentage of Jewish people. ⁴⁴ Religious Conflict: risk of religious based conflict is high. In the transition from protests to civil war, the conflict has adopted an increasingly religious character, which has exacerbated grievances between Sunni and Shia Muslims. ⁴⁵ |
| A S | The population heterogeneity statistics remain consistent, but would require a census to more accurately determine any important changes. The religious element of the conflict has increased the risk posed by religious diversity. ⁴⁶ |

Demographic Stress

Deteriorating

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| S F | Population Growth Rate (Annual %): In the 2006 CIFP Baseline report, Syria had a score of 7.6. The growth rate of the population has decreased since it was recorded at 3% in 2006. It reached a low of 0.7% in 2010, before increasing to 1.7% in 2011. This rate remained stable through 2014. ⁴⁷ |
| D F | Total Population: In the 2006 CIFP Baseline report, Syria had a score of 7.0. The population has continued to increase since 2011, and was just over 22 million in 2014. ⁴⁸ Population Density (People per square km): In the 2006 CIFP Baseline report, Syria had a score of 6.0. The density has continued to increase yearly, from 114.7 in 2011, to 120.7 in 2014. ⁴⁹ Urban Population (% of Total Population): In the 2006 CIFP Baseline report, Syria had a score of 4.6, and the rate has continued to increase since then. The annual growth rate has remained stable at 2.4% from 2011 to 2014, ⁵⁰ which has resulted in a small increase in the urban population from 56.1% in 2011 to 57.3% of the total population. ⁵¹ Youth Bulge (% of Total Population aged 0-14): In the 2006 CIFP Baseline report, Syria had a score of 6.6. The percentage of youth has increased slightly in recent years. The rate declined from 38% in 2006, to 35.6% in 2010, but has been increasing, reaching 36.8% in 2014. ⁵² |
| A S | The demographic stress has increased slightly, contributing to further instability. These factors, are complicated by the challenges of large numbers of IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) and unsettled refugees. ⁵³ Further, humanitarian concerns regarding the population, particularly starvation, ⁵⁴ highlight the potential for demographic stresses to further destabilise Syria. |

Economic Performance

Deteriorating

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| D F | GDP Growth Rate (Annual %): In the 2006 CIFP Baseline report, Syria had a score of 6.0. Syria's GDP grew from 2006-2010, but began to decline in 2011. ⁵⁵ The lowest growth rate was -20% in 2013. ⁵⁶ The World Bank expected the GDP to decline by 16% in 2015. ⁵⁷ GDP Per Capita (PPP, Current International \$): In the 2006 CIFP Baseline report, Syria had a score of 6.0. The GDP per capita was increasing before the conflict, and reached 2 808 in 2010, but has since declined to 1 605 in 2013. ⁵⁸ Inflation [Consumer Prices (annual %):] In the 2006 CIFP Baseline report, Syria had a score of 1.0. Until 2011 Syria's inflation was only slightly higher than other developing MENA countries. ⁵⁹ In 2012 inflation increased to 36.7% ⁶⁰ and has remained high ⁶¹ Official Exchange Rate (LCU/US\$, period avg.): In the 2006 CIFP Baseline report, Syria had a score of 5.0. It has maintained a constant rate of 11.2. ⁶² The examination of the exchange rates in current US\$ indicates greater fluctuation. ⁶³ FDI [Net Inflows (%of GDP)]: In the 2006 CIFP Baseline report, Syria had a score of 7.0. FDI increased from 2006-7 ⁶⁴ It continued to rise until the conflict, when FDI sharply declined. ⁶⁵ |
| A S | Prior to the conflict, Syria's economy was growing at a similar rate to other MENA developing countries. ⁶⁶ Since 2011, economic decline has continued to impact Syria and pose further risks of destabilization. Additional challenges to economic growth and improvements include the emergence illicit economic networks and conflict economies represent. ⁶⁷ In addition, the destruction caused by the conflict presents a long-term obstacle towards future recovery and growth. ⁶⁸ |

Human Development

Deteriorating

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| S F | Infant Mortality Rate – CIFP has rated infant mortality rate at 5.0. In 2006, infant mortality rate was 14 deaths per 1000 live births. In 2011, there were 13 deaths while in 2015 it dropped to 11 deaths. |
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| D F | <p>Gross enrollment rate (% of primary; both sexes) – CIFP indicates that enrollment in primary education is 3.6. In 2011, total enrollment in primary education was at 121%, however it dropped significantly in 2013 to 74%.⁶⁹</p> <p>Health expenditure per capita (current US\$)– CIFP ranked health expenditure as a 7.0 in 2006. In 2013, the Syrian government's spent 43 US dollars per capita. In 2011, Syria spent 97 dollars per capita.⁷⁰ This shows a reduction by more than half spent per person since the start of the conflict.</p> <p>Unemployment total (% of total labour force) – In 2011, 14.9% of Syrians were unemployed. In 2014 this significantly increased to 57.7% with 3.72 million unemployed persons.⁷¹</p> <p>Life Expectancy – In 2006, CIFP ranked life expectancy at 5.0. In 2010, life expectancy was 75.9 years. This dropped in 2014 by 27% to 55.7 years.⁷² This would indicate a decline in the CIFP score.</p> |
| A S | <p>Syria's human development was progressing well prior to the civil war. School enrollment fell significantly following the outbreak of war as did life expectancy. As Syrians are not becoming educated, this is a factor that may prolong the conflict.⁷³ Comparatively to other Middle Eastern Countries, Syria's expenditures on public health are low.⁷⁴ The reduction in these factors results in an overall deteriorating situation for human development in Syria.</p> |

Environmental Stress

Stable

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| SF | <p>Deforestation - CIFP rated deforestation at a 2.0. In 2006 the rate of deforestation was occurring at 2.5% per year. In 2013 there was a slight increase to 2.7%.⁷⁵ Annual rates of deforestation in Syria are comparatively low in the Middle East.</p> <p>Air Quality – In 2010, CO2 emissions were 3.0% and in 2011 they had reduced to 2.7%.⁷⁶</p> |
| DF | <p>Land Under Cereal Production (hectares) – In 2013, 2,668,943 hectares were used for cereal production, which is one of the core industries for agriculture.⁷⁷ In 2006, the amount of land used was 3,147,586 due to reduced conflict and good environmental conditions for agriculture while in 2011 there was 2,875,119 hectares used.⁷⁸</p> <p>Rainfall Scarcity – Syria has suffered a prolonged multi-seasonal drought from 2006-2011, which left approximately 3 million Syrian farmers moving into urban settings.⁷⁹ During the winter (wet season), precipitation levels fell from 50mm/month of rainfall to 37mm/month. Rainfall dropped to 66% of the long-term average in Syria.⁸⁰ 2014 saw less than half of the long-term average of rainfall, thus not relieving the economic strain that farmers felt and causing continued tensions between government forces and famers.⁸¹</p> |
| AS | <p>Syria's environment suffers significantly from access to freshwater resources and the 2006-2011 drought has been linked to the cause of armed conflict.⁸² Other environmental issues have not resulted in significant changes. For the continuation of violence in Syria, environmental changes are not significant factors but continued drought may lead to ongoing tensions.</p> |

International Linkages

Deteriorating

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| SF | <p>International Organizations: In the 2006 CIFP baseline report, Syria received a Global Rank Score of 4.0 on the UN Organizations Index meaning that it was involved in a number of UN organizations. Syria is also currently a member to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and an Observer of the World Trade Organization (WTO).⁸³ Since 2011, and Syria's suspension from the Arab League,⁸⁴ they have been ostracised from the international community and thus have had a deteriorating presence in multilateral organizations. That being said, their presence within international organizations could be argued to be playing a stabilizing role.</p> |
| DF | <p>Foreign Relations: The Assad regime's closest allies remain Iran, Russia and China. The Syrian conflict and Russia's recent involvement in airstrikes in order to support the Assad regime have caused tensions within the international community and have had a deteriorating effect on Syria's foreign relations.</p> <p>International Disputes: Along with ongoing border disputes with Lebanon and Israel, Syria has experienced a large-scale intrastate conflict since 2011. The international element pertains to the presence of members from the US-led coalition arming and training opposition groups currently fighting the Assad regime in Syria.</p> |
| AS | <p>Apart from Syria's close allies, namely Iran and Russia, Syria's suspension from the Arab League and isolation from the international community has led to the severing of the majority of Syria's international linkages demonstrating deterioration.</p> |

Possible Scenarios

| Best Case | Most Likely | Worst Case |
|--|---|---|
| <p>The Geneva 2016 Peace Conference results in a peace agreement between the opposition parties and the Assad government. A ceasefire begins shortly after the agreement is reached and following increasing pressures from the international community, Assad agrees to a transition of power. Meanwhile, fighting escalates between ISIS, the opposition forces and the US-led coalition. Assad's resignation and the escalation of conflict causes Russia to retreat from Syria. The coalition is then able to defeat ISIS and peacekeeping, peacebuilding and reconstruction begins.</p> | <p>The most likely case is that the UN-led peace talks in Geneva are unsuccessful due to unwillingness to meet or compromise by the Assad regime, opposition forces or both. The Assad regime remains in power and human rights abuses, and conflict continue at the same rate resulting in numerous casualties. The US-led coalition continues military operations while tensions between the United States and Russia increase. There is ongoing struggle for territory between ISIS the US-led coalition, government forces and rebel forces. The number of refugees and IDPs continues to increase.</p> | <p>The Geneva 2016 Peace Talks are unsuccessful and conflict escalates leading to higher levels of mortality. The US-led coalition airstrikes are unable to prevent ISIS' expansion and consolidation of territory in Syria and Iraq further destabilizing the region. The Assad government remains in power and continues to commit human rights abuses against civilians. Neighbouring countries will continue to experience the destabilizing effects of refugee migration causing instability and heightened tension in the region. An inevitable stalemate deters the US-led coalition causing a withdrawal.</p> |

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