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Ending Insurgency: Analyzing the Syrian Conflict

Abstract:

How will the Syrian conflict end? This paper, referencing the RAND report “How Insurgencies End,”¹ analyzes seven factors that correlate with insurgent success/defeat in Syria. These components are: conflict duration, urbanization, sanctuary for the insurgents, intervention for the government, intervention for the insurgents, military structure of the insurgency, and use of terrorism. After examination, it is established that intervention for the insurgents will be the determining factor in the war’s outcome.

¹ Connable, Ben, and Martin C. Libicki. *How Insurgencies End*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2010.

Ending Insurgency: Analyzing the Syrian Conflict

With the Syrian civil war continuing for nearly thirty months and diplomatic efforts stalling, what does the past history of civil wars tell us about what to expect? This essay will examine the components that have been shown to cause an insurgent victory or defeat and apply them to the Syrian conflict. After these components have been examined, the decisive component in the ending of the Syrian civil war appears to be third party intervention on behalf of the insurgents.

James D. Fearon examines 128 civil wars and analyses what caused them to be short or to endure. He determines that wars caused by coups or popular revolutions tend to be short. He defines "popular revolution" as "a civil war that, at its outset, involved mass demonstrations in the capital city in favor of deposing the regime in power."² The median length he calculates for popular revolutions is 2.1 years and the mean is 3 years; whereas wars that did not meet this criterion have a median of 9 years and a mean of 12.9 years. The median number killed in popular revolutions, he reports to be 4,000, compared to 29,000 for the rest of the wars. The Syrian conflict is beginning to claim a position amongst the longer and deadlier sides of popular revolutionary wars and coups with over 100,000 killed in a period of 2.5 years between the start of the war in March 2011 and July 2013. If Fearon's thesis is correct, an end to the continuing loss of life in Syria is approaching. However, a quick end appears more and more unlikely, and the Syrian war could prove an exception to this hypothesis.

Another analysis reaches a few different conclusions. The study by Ben Connable and Martin C. Libicki at the RAND Corporation is entitled "How Insurgencies End." This report analyzes several components that may or may not be present in insurgencies and correlates them with an insurgent or a government victory. The components which will be examined in this essay due to their relevance to the Syrian conflict are: duration of the conflict, urbanization, available sanctuary for the insurgents, third party intervention for the government, third party intervention for the insurgents, networked or hierarchical military of the insurgency, and use of terrorism.

Duration of Conflict

According to the study, insurgencies tend to last approximately ten years. Typically, insurgencies end within sixteen years. If an insurgency lasts longer than that, the correlation shows the government is likely to win.³ The reason for this, Mao Tse-tung asserts, is that the insurgencies cannot maintain popular support because they may change their message, begin indiscriminate terror attacks, or because the government offers to reform, nullifying the insurgency.⁴

By tracing the timeline of the Syrian uprising-turned-civil war, we can shed some light on where Syria falls in the insurgency timeline. The roots of the uprising began in the southern city of Deraa, when a few schoolboys graffitied, "The people demand the fall of the regime" on the walls of a nearby school. In a disproportionate response, local authorities beat and tortured the children, ignoring their parents' pleas for their release. This was the spark that set the revolution into motion. On March 18, 2011, thousands of protestors gathered outside of al-Omari Mosque and "marched at security forces, demanding the release of the children, greater political freedom, and an end to government corruption."⁵ When the authorities could not stop the protestors,

² Fearon, James D. "Why Do Some Civil Wars Last So Much Longer than Others?" *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 3 (2004): 280. doi:10.1177/0022343304043770.

³ Connable, Ben, and Martin C. Libicki. *How Insurgencies End*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2010: 29.

⁴ *Ibid*, 30-31

⁵ Ziadeh, Radwan. *Chapter 6: Revolution in Syria: The Struggle for Freedom in a Regional Battle*. Forthcoming.

the soldiers opened fire and killed four. After this, the protests spread to nearby towns and grew larger each day.⁶

Just one month in, protests grew even larger and Assad deployed the Syrian Armed Forces, ordering them to "shoot to kill."⁷ After Assad's response, the international community began to take notice. In May, the US and European Union enhanced the sanctions they held against Assad in an effort to sway his actions regarding the protestors.⁸ To direct operations and garner more international support, the opposition came together in July in Istanbul, where they had been granted sanctuary. They formed the Free Syrian Army (FSA) to counteract the military advancements of the regime.⁹ The FSA is a loose conglomerate consisting of defectors and locals who have taken up arms against Assad. In October, representatives came together to form the Syrian National Council (SNC), which became the political face of the opposition and the point of contact for supporting countries.¹⁰

Because of Syria's continuing violence against protestors, a United Nations (UN) resolution condemning Syria was put forth in November 2011, but was vetoed by Russia and China who maintain support for Assad.¹¹ The US and many in the international community promised to further back the rebels if they possessed a united and more fully representative body. As a result, the rebels came together and formed the more inclusive National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces.¹²

In summation, the insurgency has continued for about two and a half years. In the RAND study, 77 cases of insurgency were studied, and after two years of conflict, the government won 25 times, the insurgents won 22 times, and there were "mixed outcome[s]," or settlements, 15 times.¹³ Because of the complexities of the Syrian situation and the stalemate that persists, it is hard to predict if the war will continue for a long time (or indeed reach the 10 year average length for insurgencies). Much depends on tipping points, especially intervention by third parties to help the government, and intervention by third parties to help the insurgents (two issues that will be explored in more depth later). Suffice it to say, the Syrian conflict is a long way from the 16 year mark that would favor a government victory.

Urbanization

In regions where there was less than 40 percent urbanization, the government lost approximately 75 percent of the time, and where urbanization was between 40 and 70 percent, the government won at a rate of 3 to 1. The RAND report notes that "insurgencies appear to be far more successful in the countryside than in cities."¹⁵ Even

⁶ "Syria Profile." BBC News. January 05, 2013. Accessed February 24, 2013. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14703995>.

⁷ Ziadeh

⁸ Syria Profile, www.bbc.co.uk

⁹ "The Official Homepage of the Free Syrian Army." Free Syrian Army: Home. Accessed February 24, 2013. <http://www.free-syrian-army.com/>.

¹⁰ "The Syrian National Council-Carnegie Middle East Center - Carnegie Endowment for International Peace." Carnegie Middle East Center. Accessed February 24, 2013. <http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=48334>.

¹¹ Syria Profile, www.bbc.co.uk

¹² MacFarquhar, Neil, and Hwaida Saad. "Rebel Groups In Syria Make Framework For Military." The New York Times. December 08, 2012. Accessed February 8, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/08/world/middleeast/rebel-groups-in-syria-make-framework-for-military.html?pagewanted=1>.

¹³ Of these 77 cases studied, 15 are still going.

¹⁴ Connable, 28

¹⁵ Ibid, 88

though insurgents can better coordinate in closer urban quarters, it is also easier for the government to track and target the insurgents. This tips the scale toward the government. Additionally, it is easier to gain support in the countryside as compared to the “more complex audiences” that exist in the cities.¹⁶ However, hybrid insurgencies that possess rural and urban areas can have an advantage. The insurgents have rural areas to fall back on when the urban area has been defeated. Sanctuary areas are important for such recuperation as well.¹⁷

The urban population in Syria is 54.2 percent, while the rural population is 45.8 percent as of 2010.¹⁸ These statistics are not favorable based on the win rate laid out in the RAND report. A comparison of a map of the population densities on Syrian land and a map of the major conflict areas shows that they are nearly synonymous. The fighting is going on in the populated urban areas, and not in the rural areas. This is troubling because “extremely violent repressive tactics” committed by the government are more successful in urban terrain.¹⁹ Urbanization is probably a tally against the insurgency and for the government. At the same time, the insurgents are likely using rural areas and Turkey to regroup after battles, which could spare them the fate of so many other urban insurgencies.

Sanctuary Available

A strong correlation exists between insurgents possessing a sanctuary and insurgent victory, according to most current analysts.²⁰ The RAND study concluded that when insurgents had sanctuary, they won nearly half of the conflicts (23 out of 52); whereas, when the insurgents did not enjoy sanctuary they won only three times out of twenty-two.²¹ By enjoying a safe area, insurgents have the opportunity to “train, organize, rest, refit and, if necessary, hibernate.”²² The most valuable kind of sanctuary is third country voluntary sanctuary, which is typically coupled with aid and assistance from the host country throughout the conflict.²³ Conversely, an insurgent’s loss of sanctuary is strongly correlated to a loss in the conflict. As the RAND report states, “we found that the list of disadvantages posed by the loss of sanctuary to be both extensive and telling.”²⁴

The Syrian insurgency has gained voluntary sanctuary in Turkey after over ten thousand fled there in early June 2011.²⁵ The war has continued and so has the refugee flow. As of late June, approximately 363,000 Syrian refugees are living in Turkey.²⁶ In a more strategic gesture, Turkey has chosen to provide sanctuary to the military opposition (the FSA), and to the political opposition, which was previously the SNC and is now the

¹⁶ Ibid, 94

¹⁷ Ibid, 97

¹⁸ "Urban Population in Syria." Trading Economics. Accessed April 2, 2013. <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/syria/urban-population-wb-data.html>.

¹⁹ Connable, 96

²⁰ Ibid, 35

²¹ Ibid, 38

²² Ibid, 39

²³ Ibid, 40

²⁴ Ibid, 49.

²⁵ Naftalin, Mark, and Kristian Berg Harpviken. "Rebels and Refugees, Syrians in Southern Turkey." *Prio Policy Brief*, October 2012, 1-4. Accessed March 01, 2013. http://file.prio.no/Publication_files/Prio/Naftalin-Harpviken-Syrian-Rebels-and-Refugees-PRIO-Policy-Brief-10-2012.pdf.

²⁶ Birnbaum, Michael. "Turkey protests put strain on Syria planning." *The Washington Post*. June 20, 2013. Accessed June 25, 2013. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/turkey-protests-put-strain-on-syria-planning/2013/06/20/1de729b2-d9de-11e2-b418-9dfa095e125d_story.html

National Coalition. Additionally, the Turkish government initiated sanctions against Syria.²⁷ Some reports indicate that Turkey is arming the FSA through its national intelligence organization, Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı (MIT).²⁸ This is unclear. However, it is cooperating with the Gulf states in transferring arms.²⁹ In fact, in January 2013, the insurgents acquired a large shipment of weapons including anti-aircraft and armor-piercing weapons, mortars, and rocket launchers. The shipment also came with money to pay the fighters. These weapons arrived “openly via Turkey” through the Bab al-Hawa crossing, reported a rebel commander. No smuggling was involved.³⁰ It is apparent that Turkey has set up a vast network of support, not just geographically, but logistically, militarily, and financially.

What are Turkey’s motives for creating this sanctuary for the insurgents? Christopher Phillips reports that “Primarily, Turkey fears a protracted civil war and the collapse of Syria’s territorial integrity, aware that it could embolden Kurdish separatists, provide a safe haven for Islamist terrorists and lure in regional competitors.”³¹ By supporting the opposition, it can strengthen its ally, the Muslim Brotherhood, within the political opposition. By thus supporting the National Coalition and FSA, Turkey is aiming to align itself strongly with the successor to Assad. It is also trying to limit the influence of regional powers that are sending money and supplies to parties that Turkey does not back.³²

The correlation between sanctuary and insurgent success seems very strong in this instance. However insurgent loss is correlated even more strongly with insurgent loss of sanctuary. It is worthwhile exploring Turkey’s internal political situation to assess if this might be a possibility. As with so many in the international community, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his colleagues did not anticipate the Syrian conflict becoming so deep and lengthy. They underestimated the offensive weaponry possessed by Assad and they overestimated the unity of the opposition.³³ Because approximately 363,000 Syrian refugees have flooded into Turkey, Turkey could follow the pattern of so many other refugee-hosting countries and end up with sectarian tension in its own backyard. Already, the 500,000 Alawis in Turkey are frightened by the influx of mostly Sunni refugees who may seek revenge on them for being members of the same sect as Assad. The Turkish Alevis, a larger group of 15-20 million people are nervous, as well, because of their similarities with the Alawis. First their name is similar to the Alawis, second both represent a non-Orthodox form of Islam, and third both share a reverence for Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet.³⁴ Even among the Sunni majority in Turkey, the ruling party is being confronted with dislike for its policies on Syria.³⁵

Until now, Erdoğan has invested extensive resources into aiding the Syrian insurgency, and it would be difficult to step back from such a position. However, in light of the massive protests that raged in Istanbul and around the country this summer, Erdoğan’s leadership team and all of their decisions are being greatly scrutinized. Many Turks are saying they wish their country had not intervened in the sectarian conflict of their neighbors. Because of the unrest at home, Erdoğan’s focus has moved to domestic concerns, and his political capital is

²⁷ Phillips, Christopher. "Turkey's Syria Problem." Turkey's Syria Problem | OpenDemocracy. September 28, 2012. Accessed March 1, 2013. <http://www.opendemocracy.net/christopher-phillips/turkey's-syria-problem>.

²⁸ Naftalin, 3.

²⁹ Phillips, www.opendemocracy.net

³⁰ Marsden, Chris. "US Moves Towards Open Arming of Syrian Opposition." Global Research. February 28, 2013. Accessed March 01, 2013. <http://www.globalresearch.ca/us-moves-towards-open-arming-of-syrian-opposition/5324636>.

³¹ Phillips, www.opendemocracy.net

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Abaza, Khairi and Soner Cagaptay. "Alawites and Alevis: What's in a Name." Fikra Forum. October 11, 2012. Accessed August 23, 2013. <http://fikraforum.org/?p=2764>

³⁵ Phillips, www.opendemocracy.net

quickly being spent. Osama Faruk Logoglu, a deputy chairman of the Turkish opposition Republican People's Party and former ambassador to the US, has said that Erdoğan's "wings have been clipped."³⁶ This is especially true in the foreign policy sphere. He is no longer free to make policies on Syria as he pleases. At the same time, however, he considers his relationship with the US incredibly important and the policies and pressures of the US will likely influence his decisions as long as he remains in power.³⁷

What will happen to the rebels' Turkish sanctuary is also unclear. The real question, for the purpose of this essay, lies in whether sufficient motivation exists for Turkey to withdraw the sanctuary. Though the Syrian conflict has taken its toll in Turkey, anti-Assad sentiment still reigns among Turkish leaders. They realize that an end of this sanctuary would mean an end to the revolution in favor of Assad. It is in their best political and strategic interests to aid the insurgents. Moreover, the international community strongly holds these same sentiments. Because of Turkish and international support, and because of Turkey's signature on the 1951 Refugee Convention that binds it to aiding the refugees, it will likely continue its gift of sanctuary to the rebels at least as long as Erdoğan's party remains in power.³⁸

Third party intervention for the government

In the 89 insurgencies studied in the RAND report, third parties intervened with troops on the ground or with air support 21 times. They responded indirectly, with money or advising, 8 times. The results of direct support show that the government is not more likely to win because of the aid. Rather, the war's conclusion is more likely to be a "mixed settlement" between the insurgents and the government. Indirect intervention resulted in challenges as well.³⁹

Third parties can face many complications when trying to intervene in an insurgency on behalf of the government. If they offer too little support, the government will not be helped. However, if a third party offers too much support, then it "risks the creation of a weak, dependent state security apparatus"⁴⁰ in the government it is aiding. Notably, if the third party withdraws its support from the government in question, it will result in a defeat, or at best, a mixed settlement.

Russia, China and Iran are three of the staunch supporters that the Assad regime boasts. Determining the extent of aid they will devote and the loyalty they will show is difficult, but by examining their steadfastness, we can better decipher the future success of the regime. The government also boasts fighters from Hezbollah, a group that has become increasingly active in the conflict.

Russia has taken the strongest stance within the international community regarding Syria. It continues to block UN resolutions that would condemn the violence and call for a political transition. The reasons that Russia supports Assad so devoutly are numerous and quite deep-seated. First, Russia is interested in Syria's arms industry. In 2011 alone, Russia sold approximately \$1 billion worth of arms to Syria and maintains \$4 billion in outstanding contracts. Reports from Reuters say that shipments of small arms have been increasing since the beginning of the conflict.⁴¹ Second, Russia and Syria have significant trade commitments. Because Syria's manufacturing sector is falling apart from the sanctions and from a history of mismanagement, the regime has

³⁶ Birnbaum, www.washingtonpost.com

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Phillips, www.opendemocracy.net

³⁹ Connable, 49-50

⁴⁰ Ibid, 51

⁴¹ Manfreda, Primoz. "Why Does Russia Support the Syrian Regime." About.com Middle East Issues. Accessed March 11, 2013. <http://middleeast.about.com/od/syria/a/Why-Does-Russia-Support-The-Syrian-Regime.htm>.

been importing petroleum products, grains, electrical equipment and more from Russia. In 2011, when the conflict began, trade went up 58% which equates to \$1.97 billion.⁴² Analysts estimate that the regime has ordered “hardware” totaling \$3.5 billion.⁴³ Third, Russia is propagating the principle of non-interference.⁴⁴ This is largely because Russia feels the US and its allies interfere in conflicts for their own gain. Russia was particularly unhappy with the Libyan intervention and hopes to prevent similar occurrences. Lastly, “the most tangible prize” that Moscow claims is its only naval base on the Mediterranean, called Tartous point, a valuable military base for Russia.⁴⁵ Indeed, Syria is the extent of Russia’s influence in the Middle East. Ruslan Pukhov, Member of the Public Council under the Russian Defense Ministry and Director of the Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies (CAST),⁴⁶ is quoted saying, “Syria is the only country in the Middle East which follows our advice, this is the country where we can exercise certain tangible influence... Of course, the loss of Syria will mean we will have no influence in this region at all. It has some symbolic value for the Russian authorities and the foreign policy establishment as a sign of Russia as a great power.”⁴⁷ Clearly Russia’s stake in the region is more than just political.

China has been right at Russia’s side when it comes to blocking UN resolutions against Assad. There are multiple reasons for China’s support, but likely, the main reason that it has taken this stance is to build a “coalition of interests” with Russia. Russia now owes China a favor, and this could perhaps be exploited on the issue of North Korea. If China is determined to maintain a good position with Russia at the expense of the lives of Syrians, it is not likely to change its stance unless Russia does.⁴⁸

The third player, and a very large one because of its gifts of human and military resources, as well as its close proximity to Syria, is Iran. One of Iran’s “highest priorities” is keeping Assad in power.⁴⁹ By March 2012, Iran had already sent hundreds of advisors, and security and intelligence operatives to Syria. They also sent weapons, money and electronic surveillance devices.⁵⁰ In March 2013, US Secretary of State John Kerry met with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki of Iraq to discuss the “close to daily” shipments of what Iraq and Iran claimed to be humanitarian supplies that are being flown from Iran to Syria.⁵¹ In August, Kerry continued talks with Iraq. Little progress has been made.⁵² A senior Western security official stated that “The Iranians are

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Von Eggert, Konstantin. "Why Russia Is Standing by Syria's Assad." BBC News. June 15, 2012. Accessed March 11, 2013. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-18462813>.

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Manfreda, middleeast.about.com

⁴⁶ "Valdai. Валдай. Discussion Club. Международный Дискуссионный Клуб." PUKHOV, Ruslan. Accessed March 01, 2013. <http://valdaiclub.com/authors/29320.html>.

⁴⁷ Rosenberg, Steve. "Why Russia Sells Syria Arms." BBC News. June 29, 2012. Accessed March 1, 2013. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-18642032>.

⁴⁸ Grammaticas, Damian. "China's Stake in the Syria Stand-off." BBC News. February 24, 2012. Accessed May 12, 2013. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-17158889>.

⁴⁹ "Iran 'steps up Syria Support', Hillary Clinton Warns." BBC News. January 02, 2013. Accessed March 11, 2013. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-21289219>.

⁵⁰ Warrick, Joby, and Liz Sly. "U.S. Officials: Iran Is Stepping up Lethal Aid to Syria." Washington Post. March 03, 2012. Accessed March 27, 2013. http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-03-03/world/35449594_1_homs-bab-amr-intelligence-reports.

⁵¹ Lee, Matthew. "Kerry Warns Iraq on Iran Aid to Syria." U-T San Diego. March 25, 2013. Accessed March 27, 2013. <http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2013/mar/25/tp-kerry-warns-iraq-on-iran-aid-to-syria/>.

⁵² “Iraq must stop weapons from flowing into Syria: Kerry.” The Daily Star. August 15, 2013. Accessed August 21, 2013. <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/International/2013/Aug-15/227512-iraq-must-stop-weapons-from-flowing-into-syria-kerry.ashx>

desperate for their most important regional ally to survive the current crisis. And Iran's involvement is starting to pay dividends."⁵³ Syria is also valuable to Iran because of Syria's assistance in Iran's link to Hezbollah. Iran uses Hezbollah, a militia-cum-political party in Lebanon, to fight a proxy war against Israel. These assets are vital to the Iranian leadership. Hezbollah, in fact, has also participated extensively in the civil war. The Assad regime has the command of thousands of Hezbollah fighters. They have proven "extremely effective," and where the Syrian troops have been more reluctant in certain brutal measures against their own people, Hezbollah has no such ties.⁵⁴ In fact, with Hezbollah's help, the strategic city of Qusair was recaptured for the regime.⁵⁵

Clearly, the Assad regime is not getting too little aid from external countries; however, it is possible that it is receiving so much that it is reliant and could fall apart if one of more of its supporters backed out. In late December 2012, Russia conceded that Assad may be losing the struggle, and Russia made contingency plans to pull out Russian citizens.⁵⁶ What if the rebels gained significant successes and Russia chose to stop backing Assad either with as much force or altogether? This would certainly mean a quick UN resolution that would spell the destruction of the regime. The question lies in whether Russia is going to give up its support. Since more than 100,000 Syrians have died so far in the conflict, it seems that Russia is not going to stop its support if the death toll increases. Perhaps the most likely outcome is if the rebels come within reach of winning the country, Russia will likely bid for a political, face-saving solution. Perhaps the only other way Russia will end its support, or its support will be overridden by other UN Member States, is if Assad initiates widespread use of chemical weapons.

It has been confirmed by the US on June 13, 2013, that Assad used chemical weapons, in particular sarin gas, which killed 100-150 Syrians.¹ Despite American efforts, the Russian government maintained its support for Assad and claims that the UN is politicizing events. Again, on August 31, reports cite hundreds dead from a chemical weapons attack on the outskirts of Damascus. Despite this, Russia has thus far maintained its support of Assad.⁵⁷

Iran is certainly sending vast amounts of weaponry to Assad and has propped him up to a large degree. Mehdi Khalaji, an Iran specialist at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, said, "Iran so far was successful; without Iran's money and strategic help, Assad would have fallen much earlier... But in terms of policy, they have a Plan B.... So even if Assad falls, to some extent Iran would be able to protect its interests."⁵⁸ It seems that the countries providing Iran with its hardware are not necessarily counting on the success of the regime. The

⁵³ Coughlin, Ben. "Iran Sends Elite Troops to Aid Bashar Al-Assad Regime in Syria." The Telegraph. September 6, 2012. Accessed March 27, 2013. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/9526858/Iran-sends-elite-troops-to-aid-Bashar-al-Assad-regime-in-Syria.html>.

⁵⁴ Business Intelligence Brief. "Will Economics Doom the Syrian Rebellion?" KC Chamber. June 28, 2013. Accessed July 15, 2013.

⁵⁵ "Syria conflict: Qusair's strategic importance." BBC. June 5, 2013. Accessed June 25, 2013.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-22595767>

⁵⁶ Barry, Ellen, and Steven Erlanger. "In Setback for Assad, Russia Offers a Dark View of His Chances for Survival." The New York Times. December 14, 2012. Accessed March 27, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/14/world/middleeast/russian-envoy-says-syrian-leader-is-losing-control.html?pagewanted=all>.

⁵⁷ "Syria conflict: 'Chemical attacks' kill hundreds." BBC. August 21, 2013. Accessed August 21, 2013.

<http://mobile.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-33777201>

⁵⁸ Peterson, Scott. "Iran's Support for Syria Still Appears Strong - but Is It Hedging Its Bets?" The Christian Science Monitor. March 28, 2013. Accessed April 13, 2013. <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2013/0328/Iran-s-support-for-Syria-still-appears-strong-but-is-it-hedging-its-bets>.

question is: if the insurgents begin to gain substantial ground militarily, what would be Iran's next move? At what point would it withdraw its support?

Networked or hierarchical military of the insurgency

A hierarchical military is one in which there is a clear chain of command. Orders go from the top to the bottom and at the bottom are obeyed. Alternatively, a "networked" insurgency is one in which there is not a vertical chain of command. Rather the organization is flat, and the leadership unclear.⁵⁹ In some cases there exists a combination of both, and at times the two are equal. Military makeup is also dynamic and subject to change throughout a conflict. The RAND study found that networked insurgencies have lost significantly more than they have won, while hierarchical insurgencies "have a more even record."⁶⁰ Often when networked insurgencies achieve success, there has been at least a short period in which it was hierarchical. "Pure" networked insurgencies are nearly never successful.⁶¹

The Syrian insurgency is largely networked. The insurgent military, as mentioned, is the Free Syrian Army (FSA). Because the groups are so loosely affiliated and are not often connected to or respondent to command structures, the very existence of such an entity has been called into question.⁶² The opposition is not an "army" necessarily, but a more of a branding.⁶³ A great number of the fighters are small groups in neighborhoods that have joined to defend themselves or become a part of the revolution. They buy weapons out of savings, by selling valuables, or by borrowing money from friends. Though some are effective in obtaining money from foreign donors.⁶⁴ Militias, brigades and battalions are fighting on their own behalf. However, most do nominally associate with the FSA in order to be connected with the larger movement, even if just by name.⁶⁵

Some hierarchy has been established through a dozen or more FSA "Military Councils" that have been established inside the country. They largely represent the militant groups in the area. The command power of the Military Councils varies. Some are able to issue commands, while others have power merely to suggest areas of coordination.⁶⁶ Brian Sayers from the Syrian Support Group, a group that provides money and training to Military Councils, said that "If you ask any of the [previously] nine Military Council commanders, they will tell you they have no general commander." This statement highlights the networked nature of the insurgency.⁶⁷ In fact, the former head of the FSA, Riad Asaad said of the FSA, "There are general instructions; we issue general instructions. But as you know, in guerilla wars in general the commander is in charge. Commanders have the freedom to act because sometimes contact can be lost, but they can't ignore general instructions, and they abide by them in military action."⁶⁸

⁵⁹ Connable, 77

⁶⁰ Ibid, 79-80

⁶¹ Ibid, 81-83

⁶² Lund, Aron. "The Free Syrian Army Doesn't Exist." Syria Comment RSS. March 16, 2013. Accessed April 16, 2013. <http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/the-free-syrian-army-doesnt-exist>.

⁶³ Ziadeh

⁶⁴ "Q&A: Nir Rosen on Syria's Armed Opposition." Al Jazeera English. February 13, 2012. Accessed May 13, 2013. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/02/201221315020166516.html>.

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ *Inside Syria's War*. Dateline SBS. July 31, 2012. Accessed February 28, 2013. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AimlzEGHLN4>.

On December 7, 2012, the rebels declared the election of a thirty-member “unified command structure” called the Joint Military Command Council, or the Supreme Military Council (SMC). This council has made headway into creating a more hierarchical insurgency that better integrates the rebel groups and has improved the communication amongst all parties. Elizabeth O’Bagy, a Senior Research Analyst at the Institute for the Study of War, notes that, “the SMC has played an important role in syncing rebel operations with several notable successes. It has allowed for greater opportunities for collaboration and coordination among the disparate rebel groups operating in Syria.”⁶⁹ In the event of an insurgent victory, the SMC is the only organization that has the capacity to fill the security void that the fall of the regime would leave.⁷⁰ However, despite these strengths, the SMC has not had a great deal of success in creating a hierarchical chain of command. Because it doesn’t have command over the resources being distributed, groups have no incentive to fall in line under it.⁷¹

Many opposition brigades do not affiliate with the FSA. They are largely Islamist and jihadist brigades such as Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), both of which are considered terrorist organizations by the US. Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS have a complex relationship with one another as both are affiliated with al-Qaeda but often conflict with one another regarding how the new Islamic state in Syria should be implemented.⁷²

Jabhat al-Nusra possesses about 5,000 fighters, making up a strong presence in Syrian battles.⁷³ Jabhat al-Nusra is, in fact, hierarchical in its chain of command, and this attribute is one of the reasons for its battlefield successes. Another Islamist group that holds slightly less radical views is Ahrar al-Sham which wields significant military power in Idlib, Hama, and Aleppo.⁷⁴ Ahrar al-Sham possesses 5,000-8,000 fighters.⁷⁵ Both groups are “among the most extreme Salafi groups in the Syrian rebel movement.”⁷⁶ Though there is significant representation in the opposition from moderate brigades and battalions, they possess a more networked structure while the Islamist groups appear to possess a more hierarchical structure.

The lack of military hierarchy in the moderate parts of the military is related to the flow of money and weapons. Some money is going through FSA channels to brigades, some is going directly to local brigades without the FSA’s involvement, and some is going only to Islamist brigades. Because of this, it has been difficult to achieve a chain of command. Brigades and battalions will respond to the flow of money and weapons because money and weapons achieve victory. However, this flow is sporadic and comes from varied backers. In such a situation hierarchy is not achievable. However, as mentioned, the makeup of a military is dynamic. If funds start to go from the top down to the local brigades and battalions, there will likely be more unification and a more hierarchical structure. The concern is that by giving the FSA money and weapons, some of them might get into the hands of Jabhat al-Nusra or ISIS and someday (either soon or in the future) be used against the US, Israel, or another target of al-Qaeda’s choosing.

⁶⁹ O’Bagy, Elizabeth. “The Free Syrian Army.” *Middle East Security Report 9, Institute for the Study of War*, March 2013, 6. Accessed March 28, 2013. <http://www.understandingwar.org/report/free-syrian-army>.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 7

⁷¹ Ibid, 28

⁷² Al-Tamimi, Aymenn Jawad. “Where Does Jabhat al-Nusra End, and the Islamic State of Iraq & ash-Sham Begin?” Syria Comment RSS. July 13, 2013. Accessed August 21, 2013. <http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/where-does-jabhat-al-nusra-end-and-the-islamic-state-of-iraq-ash-sham-begin/>

⁷³ O’Bagy, Elizabeth. “E. O’Bagy, Senior Research Analyst for the Institute for the Study of War.” Interview by author. August 19, 2013.

⁷⁴ Lund, Aron. “Syrian Jihadism.” *UIbrief* No 13 (September 14, 2012): 23. <http://turcopolier.typepad.com/files/76917.pdf>

⁷⁵ O’Bagy, interview

⁷⁶ Lund, Aron. “Syrian Jihadism”, 23.

Terrorism

Use of terrorism by insurgents has a negative effect on their win rate, not a positive effect. Insurgencies that use terrorism are more likely to have a quick ending. Terrorism is often targeted directly at non-combatants, which causes rifts between the insurgency and the local populations.⁷⁷ Out of the cases studied by the RAND report, the longer indiscriminate terror was utilized, the more likely the locals were to resort to supporting the government.⁷⁸ Insurgencies that limited their terrorist acts were “far more successful” than those using indiscriminate attacks. In fact, if an insurgency successfully limits its use of terrorism, their win-loss ratio goes from 5:11 to 14:8. This is quite a powerful turnaround.⁷⁹

Various sources have noted that both Islamist groups and the FSA have engaged in terrorist attacks. In fact, the notable July 18, 2012, bombing in Damascus that killed several top officials including Assad’s brother-in-law was alleged to be a suicide bombing by the rebel group Liwa al-Islam. This attack was a great success for the insurgency.⁸⁰ However, the groups frequently engaging in terrorist activities are Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS. From November 2011 through December 2012, Jabhat al-Nusra alone claims to have carried out 600 attacks, 40 of which were suicide attacks that killed or wounded hundreds of civilians.⁸¹ They are ready and willing to “use multiple simultaneous suicide bombings, an al-Qaeda trademark.”⁸² One account from a member of Jabhat al-Nusra defends a series of videos in which the group shot unarmed regime loyalists. He said, “We detained them, lined them up and killed them. They were fighters fighting us. So this is terrorism, but we forget that there is an entire state that has terrorized people for 40 years?” This sentiment has been repeated throughout the war. Insurgent brutality is justified because it cannot match the extreme brutality of the Assad regime.⁸³

Reports say that ISIS has opened fire on women, children,⁸⁴ and demonstrators supporting a secular Syria. ISIS has allegedly “killed scores” of civilians, a fact that favors popular rejection of ISIS.⁸⁵ Civilians in some cities view ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra as the same entity. This is perhaps because they both want an Islamic state set up immediately, even if it only encompasses the parts of Syria in their control.⁸⁶ Though the two groups have similar goals, they are different entities. In fact there have been reports that conflict is growing between them. Conflict has also been growing between these two groups and the FSA, because the FSA is desperately seeking Western military support and fears that if these groups gain influence this will become impossible. Eliot Higgins, a prominent Syria blogger, has said, “[The Islamist group] is trying to establish itself as the de facto ruler of those

⁷⁷ Connable, 99

⁷⁸ Ibid, 104

⁷⁹ Ibid, 109

⁸⁰ McElroy, Damien. "Assad's Brother-in-law and Top Syrian Officials Killed in Damascus Suicide Bomb." The Telegraph. July 18, 2013. Accessed April 8, 2013. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9408321/Assads-brother-in-law-and-top-Syrian-officials-killed-in-Damascus-suicide-bomb.html>.

⁸¹ Abouzeid, Rania. "Interview with Official of Jabhat Al-Nusra, Syria's Islamist Militia Group." Time World. December 25, 2012. Accessed April 7, 2013. <http://world.time.com/2012/12/25/interview-with-a-newly-designated-syrias-jabhat-al-nusra/>.

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ Al-Tamimi, Aymenn Jawad. "The Islamic State Of Iraq And Ash-Sham Expands Into Rural Northern Syria – Analysis." Eurasiareview. July 22, 2013. Accessed August 21, 2013. <http://www.eurasiareview.com/22072013-the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-ash-sham-expands-into-rural-northern-syria-analysis/>

⁸⁵ Al-Abed, Tareq. "The Impending Battle Between FSA, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria." Al Monitor. July 31, 2013. Accessed August 21, 2013. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2013/07/syria-possible-battle-fsa-islamic-state-iraq-syria.html>

⁸⁶ Ibid

areas of Syria where they have the most influence... They are also preparing themselves for a conflict with the other opposition groups... And that, could go on for a long time."⁸⁷

ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra have partaken in both discriminate and indiscriminate terror attacks. The two should be wary of using indiscriminate attacks, however, remembering that the use of indiscriminate terror in al-Qaeda in Iraq's (AQI) process of "Iraqification" gave into "mass criminalization and petty violence for personal gain."⁸⁸ In 2006-2007, because of the violence AQI espoused, tribal leaders in the Anbar Province of Iraq revolted in response to popular displeasure with the organization. This deprived AQI of an important safe haven. Perhaps al-Qaeda has learned some lesson from this. It may have taken note of the rising influence of Islamist organizations like Hezbollah and Hamas, which have achieved their power through winning over the people. Indeed, Jabhat al-Nusra has been engaged in relief efforts in local communities to gain support. It has provided petrol, diesel and flour to bakeries.⁸⁹ However, Syrians are wary of and even hostile to them and their al-Qaeda affiliation.⁹⁰

Jabhat al-Nusra's leader is kept highly secretive; however his nom de guerre is Mohammad al-Golani, a reference to the Golan Heights, a disputed territory between Israel and Syria. It is believed that this is a "clear indication" of al-Qaeda's desire to use the Golan Heights to attack Israel. Sources from Israel say that Israeli forces and Jabhat al-Nusra have already appeared opposite each other there.⁹¹ Not only Israel, but the US and its allies in the Middle East and beyond have reason for concern. Bashar Assad's father, Hafez al-Assad created a large capacity of chemical weapons in the 1980's, which includes deadly nerve gases. If these fall into the hands of Jabhat al-Nusra or ISIS upon an Assad defeat, the weapons would likely fall into al-Qaeda possession. Bruce Riedel, the director of the Intelligence Project at the Brookings Institution stated that "The longer the war goes on, the stronger al-Qaeda will get in Syria."⁹²

Third Party Intervention for the Insurgent

Insurgencies without outside support won about one sixth of the time in the RAND report's analysis; however, insurgencies with third party support won about half of the time.⁹³ COIN scholar, Bard E. O'Neill on this topic, states:

Unless governments are utterly incompetent, devoid of political will, and lacking resources, insurgent organizations normally must obtain outside assistance if they are to succeed. Even when substantial popular support for the insurgencies is forthcoming, the ability to effectively combat government military forces usually requires various kinds of outside help, largely because beleaguered governments are themselves beneficiaries of external assistance.⁹⁴

⁸⁷ Prothero, Mitchell. "Presence of al Qaida-linked groups in northern Syria complicates rebellion." McClatchy. August 19, 2013. Accessed August 20, 2013. http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2013/08/19/199720/presence-of-al-qaida-linked-groups.html#.UhPLgT_YHAK

⁸⁸ Connable, 103

⁸⁹ Abouzeid, "Interview...", <http://world.time.com>

⁹⁰ "A Syrian awakening?" The Economist. May 21, 2013. Accessed June 26, 2013.

<http://www.economist.com/blogs/pomegranate/2013/05/iraq-and-syria>

⁹¹ Riedel, Bruce. "Jabhat Al-Nusra Is Growing Menace To Mideast and Beyond." Al Monitor. April 8, 2013. Accessed April 11, 2013. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/04/jabhat-al-nusra-jihadist-al-qaeda-syria.html>.

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ Connable, 62

⁹⁴ Ibid, 63,64

The “manner and consistency” of the intervention is an important determinant for the success of the insurgency.⁹⁵ Outside intervention for the insurgent plays a critical role in the insurgency’s victory and a commitment *over time* is crucial. When the support was partial or abruptly decreased, the insurgency fared poorly. The lesson is that third parties should only intervene if they are committed and able to continue supporting the insurgency for the 10-16 years for which an insurgency usually persists.

Several countries have supported the Syrian insurgents. Some have given financial support, others logistical support, and a few have given assistance in obtaining armaments. The countries most active in arming the insurgents have been Arab countries, specifically Saudi Arabia and Qatar. These and other Gulf States have committed to providing millions of dollars each month to fund the needs of the rebels.⁹⁶ Turkey, along with providing sanctuary to the insurgents, has been active in supporting them in other ways as well. The Muslim Brotherhood, in hopes of gaining influence post-Assad, has been contributing to the lead brigades in each region, with the exception of Jabhat al-Nusra.⁹⁷

Saudi Arabia may be aiding the rebels in the largest capacity in terms of money and armaments, and has recently pledged yet more.⁹⁸ In addition to giving large sums of money, Saudi Arabia also arranged for the weapons-starved insurgency to obtain a large number of weapons. In fact, in February 2013, Saudi Arabia arranged for a large weapons transfer from Croatia. The weapons went primarily to groups considered “nationalist and secular” and they have been steered away from the Islamists, whom American leaders so strongly fear will obtain them. Currently, Saudi Arabia is providing anti-aircraft missiles to the opposition.⁹⁹ One American official still asserted that the war is not at a “tipping point,” and that Iran is still supplying more weapons to the regime than insurgency-backers are providing to the insurgents.¹⁰⁰

The second supplier of money and weaponry is the small Gulf nation of Qatar. While it is logical that Saudi Arabia would supply weapons to deter the influence of Iran, it is curious that Qatar would be so heavily involved. The reasoning, some suspect, is that the Emir and his former prime minister, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani, want Qatar to play a large part in reconstructing the Arab world after the Arab Spring. The policies of the new prime minister, Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al Thani, are not yet clear. The leadership and citizenry also seem to see intervention as a moral duty, as Assad is killing vast numbers of civilians.¹⁰¹ In response to these motives, Qatar has granted a large amount of aid to support the insurgency.¹⁰²

Turkey has also played a strong role in supporting the insurgency. In addition to offering sanctuary to the rebel command structure and hundreds of thousands of refugees, its role in funneling weapons has been crucial to

⁹⁵ Ibid, 64

⁹⁶ Weiss, Michael. "Syrian Rebels Say Turkey Is Arming and Training Them." The Telegraph. May 22, 2012. Accessed April 2, 2013. <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/michaelweiss/100159613/syrian-rebels-say-turkey-is-arming-and-training-them/>.

⁹⁷ "Interview with Prominent Muslim Brotherhood Member." Telephone interview by associate of author. April 16, 2013.

⁹⁸ DeYoung, Karen. "Saudi minister pledges aid to Syrian rebels." The Boston Globe. June 26, 2013. Accessed June 26, 2013. <http://www.bostonglobe.com/news/world/2013/06/25/saudi-minister-pledges-aid-for-syrian-rebels-facing-genocide-kerry-more-circumspect/Czljay5RUhRiiMRb8BWl6l/story.html>

⁹⁹ "Saudi Arabia sending anti-aircraft missiles to Syrian opposition – report." RT. June 18, 2013. Accessed August 7, 2013. <http://rt.com/news/saudi-arabia-missiles-syria-rebels-846/>

¹⁰⁰ Chivers, C. J., and Eric Schmitt. "In Shift, Saudis Are Said to Arm Rebels in Syria." The New York Times. February 26, 2013. Accessed April 2, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/26/world/middleeast/in-shift-saudis-are-said-to-arm-rebels-in-syria.html?pagewanted=all>.

¹⁰¹ Stephens, Michael. "What Is Qatar Doing in Syria?" The Guardian. August 08, 2012. Accessed April 2, 2013. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/aug/08/qatar-syria-opposition>.

¹⁰² Chivers, www.nytimes.com

the success of the insurgents. Although it may not be actively engaged in providing weapons, it is certainly not impeding it.¹⁰³ Jordan also has played a role in the capacity of arms transfers.¹⁰⁴

The Muslim Brotherhood is contributing funding and weaponry to the insurgency, as well. Some allege that the Brotherhood is trying to carve out a following so that it can grab power if Assad falls.¹⁰⁵ Having been banned from Syria by the Assad legacy, the Brotherhood believes they are the natural leaders in Syria and that their "time has come."¹⁰⁶ The group's rhetoric asserts that they are committed to human rights. However, Joshua Landis, a Syria expert at the University of Oklahoma, asserts that "there is a deep suspicion that they are using democracy to come to power, and then once they come to power, they will use the laws to suppress their critics as we [have seen] in Egypt."¹⁰⁷

The relationship between the insurgents and the United States government has greatly evolved in the past two years. In March 2013, it was discovered that US officials had been training Syrian fighters for the previous eight to twelve months in Jordan. American officials tried to downplay the situation, claiming that only Jordanians were being trained and that only non-lethal aid was being offered.¹⁰⁸ For over two years the US provided only monetary and non-lethal support to Syrians, such as uniforms, armored vehicles, communication equipment, and rations. Currently, the US is supplying the rebels with \$2.5 million per month.¹⁰⁹ In June 2013, the US pledged to provide the rebels with military aid. However, despite the passing months, the planning for arms transfers is still in its early stages. Additionally, the US has promised only light arms. The head of the FSA, General Salim Idris said, "I told them that we need anti-tank missiles and anti-aircraft missiles because these light weapons are not so effective."¹¹⁰ It is still uncertain what kinds of weapons the US will send in the future, and how involved the US will get. Currently the US remains the only Western country offering military assistance to the insurgents.

Europe has been conflicted about whether and what kind of aid to give to the rebels since the inception of the insurgency. France and England, the strongest two proponents of giving aid, are still debating whether they will provide arms to the rebels. The two have, however, provided large sums of money to the rebels.¹¹¹ Many European nations, even France and England, are afraid of where the weapons might end up. Germany has been vocal against arming the rebels. German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle stated that "[W]e have to avoid a

¹⁰³ Weiss, <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk>

¹⁰⁴ "AP: "Master Plan" Underway to Help Syria Rebels Take Damascus with U.S.-approved Airlifts of Heavy Weapons." CBSNews. March 28, 2013. Accessed April 2, 2013. http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-202_162-57576722/ap-master-plan-underway-to-help-syria-rebels-take-damascus-with-u.s.-approved-airlifts-of-heavy-weapons/.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

¹⁰⁶ Moussaoui, Rana. "Syria's Muslim Brotherhood: Foreign Funds to Serve Foreign Agendas." Middle East Online. April 3, 2013. Accessed April 3, 2013. <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=57893>.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid

¹⁰⁸ Griffin, Jennifer. "US Training Syrian Opposition Forces in Jordan for Months, Sources Say." Fox News. March 25, 2013. Accessed April 2, 2013. <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2013/03/25/us-training-syrian-opposition-forces-in-jordan-for-months-sources-say/>.

¹⁰⁹ "At crossroads, Syrian rebels eagerly await more US support." World News on NBCNEWS.com. June 25, 2013. Accessed July 10, 2013. http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/06/25/19138622-at-crossroads-syrian-rebels-eagerly-await-more-us-support?lite

¹¹⁰ Engel, Richard and Becky Bratu. "At crossroads, Syrian rebels eagerly await more US support." NBC News. June 25, 2013. Accessed June 26, 2013. http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/06/25/19138622-at-crossroads-syrian-rebels-eagerly-await-more-us-support?lite

¹¹¹ Chulov, Martin. "France Funding Syrian Rebels in New Push to Oust Assad." The Guardian. December 7, 2012. Accessed April 2, 2013. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/dec/07/france-funding-syrian-rebels>.

conflagration and we have to prevent that aggressive offensive weapons come into the wrong hands.”¹¹² Though the EU ultimately lifted the arms embargo, EU countries are still only providing non-lethal military equipment and technical aid to the insurgents.¹¹³

The question of arming the rebels has been a huge topic in the international community. There are concerns that the rebels are divided, and it is unclear to whom weapons should be given. However, if weaponry is given by the international community, whomever it is given to will have the power to unite the brigades and battalions under itself. A stronger concern is that Islamists would obtain weapons. This is a valid concern; however, analyst Elizabeth O’Bagy attests that the strength of the jihadist groups is much less than the media has portrayed.¹¹⁴ In fact, if weapons are not received by the secular opposition, the Islamist opposition, being better supplied, will become stronger, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. “If the SNC and FSA do not receive the support that we need to stop government attacks on Syrian villages, well – there are others around, who are already sending guns and extremists to Syria,” said the former Syrian National Council president Abdulbaset Sieda, “People are losing hope now, they’re ready to strike a deal with the Devil.”¹¹⁵ There are many issues to be considered in arming the insurgents. However, it is important to note that the success of the insurgency is *greatly* increased if it has state backing. So states must consider how strongly they want the insurgency to win and make funding decisions in this light.¹¹⁶

Conclusion

I. William Zartman describes the intricacies of insurgencies, highlighting the difficulties in reaching an end to hostilities.¹¹⁷ He says,

In internal conflict, the government enjoys an asymmetry of power, but the rebels compensate with an asymmetry of commitment. In the beginning they seek a redress of grievances within the rules established by the government. But when they get no satisfaction, their rebellion enters a new phase, protesting both the government’s inattention to their grievances and its right to decide the rules by which protests shall be conducted. They contest the legitimacy of government itself and take on a total and exclusive commitment to rebellion. Conflict becomes their *raison d’être*; rebellion becomes their sole concern... Anything less than their goal is an unacceptable cost, whereas total and ongoing struggle is not a cost but simply the normal condition of life. Their capabilities are magnified by their commitment.¹¹⁸

Such situations are intense and hard to assuage. When neither party is succeeding, a stalemate occurs. The government dwells on sunk costs, and the insurgents reignite their commitment to the effort, causing both sides to become entrenched in their views and commitments. Unlike interstate wars that view stalemates as the most they can attain, the warring parties in civil conflicts become even more at odds making civil conflict harder

¹¹² Samaan, Jean-Loup. "The European Dilemmas On Arming Syrian Rebels." *Al-Monitor*. March 27, 2013. Accessed April 12, 2013. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/03/eu-arming-syrian-rebels-lift-embargo-london-paris.html>.

¹¹³ "Syria Conflict: John Kerry Extends US Aid to Rebels." *BBC News*. February 28, 2013. Accessed April 2, 2013. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-21612130> 4/2/13.

¹¹⁴ O’Bagy, “The Free Syrian Army”

¹¹⁵ Lund, “Syrian Jihadism”, 19

¹¹⁶ The RAND report also asserts that insurgencies which are weaker are slightly more likely to win.

However this might have to do with the fact that in cases of insurgency the government is also weak, and often it is taking place in a failed or poorly governed state. A weak insurgency is considered one that is poorly trained, not well-equipped and/or possesses bad leadership. Because this component of analyzing insurgency is incredibly subjective, it is hard to make a clear case for Syria either way.

¹¹⁷ Licklider, Roy E. *Stopping the Killing: How Civil Wars End*. New York: New York University Press, 1993, 10, 24.

¹¹⁸ Licklider, 25

to resolve.¹¹⁹ This reality reveals the necessity of third party involvement in some conflicts to push parties towards a settlement or victory.

A peace agreement cannot realistically be achieved unless a “mutually hurting stalemate” exists; meaning that stopping the war is in the best interest of both warring parties. To achieve such a conclusive ending to a war, weapons can be given to the weaker side producing the mutually hurting stalemate. If third parties do this successfully, they can produce a peace agreement and quickly end the killing. It is important to explore the theories of third party intervention supporting the weaker side. Stephen John Stedman affirms that “[t]rouble arises... when we turn from the world of best practice to the world of political feasibility.”¹²⁰ Third parties must commit money and often lives to conclude another country’s civil war, and this is a steep price. Fen Osler Hampson asserts that the success of a peace agreement is linked to the “quality and level of support” offered by third parties.¹²¹ However, even with strong international support, problems will arise and sometimes they are insurmountable. Stedman and George Downs explain that peace agreements, even with a high level of third party support and coordination, can succumb to failure in the presence of spoilers, neighboring states opposed to the peace agreement, and the presence of valuable commodities (spoils).¹²² Because Syria possesses these elements, establishing a peace agreement has been extremely challenging. However, with the real threat of regional spillover, increased extremism, and rising humanitarian costs, it is critical that the international community take more serious steps to aid the insurgents; steps that take into consideration the limitations of mere casual aid, and promise to create real change on the ground.

To this end, we can reexamine the seven categories correlated with either success or failures of insurgencies. It must be remembered, however, when considering these conclusions that correlation does not equal causation, and utilizing this information in policy must be done cautiously. First, if a conflict has a very long duration, the insurgents are likely to fail. The Syrian conflict has only been going on for two and a half years, and thus it is difficult to guess which side the conflict’s length favors. This factor is inconclusive in determining the conflict’s outcome. The use of terrorism by certain brigades within the opposition is a negative attribute. What needs to be monitored is whether this terror is targeted or indiscriminate. Both instances have been cited. Additionally, only specific groups are engaging in terrorism. Because of this it is hard to say whether the use of terrorism will be destructive to the insurgents, making this factor inconclusive as well.

Assad has a large amount of staunch support from his loyal backers, including Russia, Iran, Hezbollah, and to a certain degree, China. However, there is always a possibility that the aid might end, perhaps spelling the fall of the regime. If events continue as they are (even with the high rate of civilian deaths caused by the regime) without a significant series of rebel victories that would indicate a turning point, it seems that the regime’s backers will continue steadfastly in their support of Assad. However, if the insurgents did come out ahead at some point, the countries supporting Assad have prepared contingency plans so as to save face. Likewise, if diplomacy were to change Russia’s mind concerning the regime and it were to agree to a UN Resolution in favor of the rebels, this would significantly injure the regime and almost certainly spell its end. This factor is tentatively in favor of the insurgents but also a bit inconclusive. Third party intervention on behalf of the insurgents would enhance the favorability of insurgent success. The rebel’s invaluable sanctuary in Turkey is a clear factor favoring the success of the insurgency. Because of the support of Turkish politicians and the

¹¹⁹ Licklider, 26-27

¹²⁰ Stedman, Stephen John, Donald Rothchild and Elizabeth M. Cousens. *Ending Civil Wars, The Implementation of Peace Agreements*. Boulder: Lynn Rienner Publishers, Inc, 2002.:3.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 4

¹²² *Ibid*, 24

overwhelming international support for sanctuary, it is likely to continue. Favoring the regime, on the other hand, is the networked makeup of the insurgent army and the high percentage of urbanization in the country.

The tipping factor that needs to be considered by policymakers is third party support of the insurgents. The correlation between third party intervention for the insurgents and success is much higher than the success rate without external support. Military logistics and communications assistance have been offered by Turkey, Jordan, the EU, and the US. Military backers include Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the Muslim Brotherhood, and most recently the US. However, support has been thus far insufficient to produce an insurgent victory or even a mutually hurting stalemate. Whether third party military support remains status quo or is strategically augmented by supporting parties is likely to be the main component in deciding whether or not a peace agreement or an insurgent victory is achieved.