



ISSUE IN FOCUS

BY FAYSAL ITANI

Losing Syria and Iraq to Jihadists

JUNE 2014

Jihadists are steadily capturing territory and resources and establishing a state in Syria and Iraq. The most capable jihadist group, the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS), now controls swathes of territory, energy resources, and sophisticated military hardware in both countries. Although the extremists are currently occupied with fighting other nonregime armed groups and the Syrian and Iraqi regimes, these efforts are a means to an end: building a state from which to confront and target the United States, its allies, and its interests in the region. These jihadist groups also bring boundless suffering to the populations they control, and serve as a magnet for and inspiration to jihadists worldwide.

The longer the United States ignores the growing threat of these jihadist groups, the more difficult it will be to roll back, as recent events in Iraq have shown. Yet, addressing it solely through a narrow counterterrorism strategy would exacerbate the problem. ISIS' base in Syria, without which it could not have made such stunning progress in Iraq, resulted from the weakness of its rebel rivals. The jihadist threat in both Iraq and Syria can therefore be stopped only if a well-armed nationalist opposition emerges in Syria, able to fight and govern effectively, defeat extremists, and credibly negotiate on behalf of Syrians in pursuit of a political transition.

Rebel infighting in northern and eastern Syria offers the United States a chance to confront the jihadists by partnering with their moderate rivals. The Syrian people themselves are willing to fight and even die in the struggle against ISIS and the danger it poses to Iraq and Syria, but without substantially greater US support, they are unlikely to succeed.

President Barack Obama's administration seeks to "rebalance" US attention and resources away from the problems of the Middle East in order to address

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growing challenges in Asia and elsewhere. Yet this is not a reason to allow the jihadist problem to fester in Syria and Iraq; it is, in fact, the very opposite. An enduring transnational terrorist threat from the region ensures the problems of the Middle East will continue to pull the United States back into labor and resource-intensive commitments. To avoid being trapped by successive crises in the Middle East, the United States must address the region's single most perilous development: the emerging jihadist threat that is exploiting and hastening Syria and Iraq's descent into moral, ideological, and political calamity.

The Nature of the Jihadist Danger and its Base in Syria

In Syria, social, economic, and political norms and structures have collapsed after forty years of regime repression and misrule. Significant swathes of territory, resources, and people in the heart of the Arab Muslim world are now open to capture by transnational jihadists. It is inconceivable that this will not seriously threaten US national security.

The Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) leads this radical phenomenon in Syria and Iraq. Over the past year, it has captured Raqqa, significant parts of the provinces of Deir al-Zour and Aleppo (including important energy assets and infrastructure), and several border crossings with Iraq. In Iraq, ISIS routed the Iraqi army and seized Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, capturing heavy weapons and transport and communications infrastructure, and freeing hundreds

of fellow militants from prison. ISIS also controls Tikrit, Fallujah, and parts of Ramadi in western Iraq. In total, the group now controls a population of some 5 million in a territory roughly the size of Jordan, and continues to expand.

AN ENDURING TRANSNATIONAL TERRORIST THREAT FROM THE REGION ENSURES THE PROBLEMS OF THE MIDDLE EAST WILL CONTINUE TO PULL THE UNITED STATES BACK INTO LABOR AND RESOURCE-INTENSIVE COMMITMENTS.

The jihadist state ISIS is building is now a magnet for aggrieved, militant Sunni Muslims, already flocking to Syria in the thousands, gaining training, experience, and confidence in their cause. In the last three years, an estimated 12,000 foreign fighters arrived in Syria.¹ Around 2,500 of these are from Western countries, and some will return to carry out attacks in their countries of origin. Many more jihadists are non-Syrians from Arab countries including Lebanon, Libya, Tunisia, and Saudi Arabia, who see their governments as the near enemy that must be dealt with before confronting the West.

Unlike most Islamist groups in Syria, ISIS has no interest in building a Syrian nation-state. Instead, it seeks to destroy the entire modern political order in the region, which it sees as a false Western creation, and establish a global Islamic caliphate. The West and its regional Arab allies are the architects and keepers of the current order, and therefore the ultimate enemies of Islam in ISIS' eyes.

ISIS' nascent state offers jihadists a base of operations in a strategically significant location. Syria and Iraq are not Afghanistan or the hinterlands of Yemen. They are the grand jihadist prize of the Arab Muslim world, bordering Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, and providing jihadists access to oil resources, weapons, and the criminal-financial networks needed to ensure recruits and military effectiveness. The United States, Europe, and the Gulf Arab states are prime targets, as are Western nationals and assets across and outside the region.

¹ Richard Barrett, *Foreign Fighters in Syria*, Soufan Group, June 2014, <http://soufangroup.com/foreign-fighters-in-syria/>.

ISIS, the Assad Regime, and the Syrian Opposition

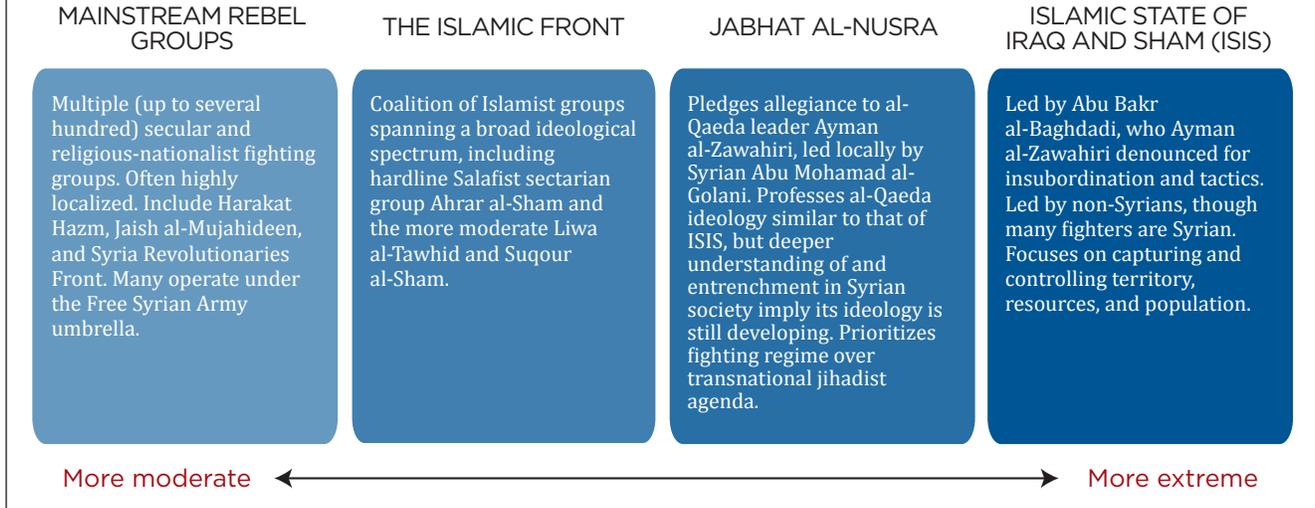
ISIS grew out of al-Qaeda's former affiliate group in Iraq, where it established a reputation for extreme violence and spectacular attacks on civilians and government forces. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who previously led Al-Qaeda in Iraq, leads ISIS today. In Iraq, al-Baghdadi's followers focus on fighting the country's Shia-dominated government on behalf of Iraqi Sunnis. Two factors drew them to Syria: the Alawite-led regime's war on a Sunni-led Syrian insurgency and the opportunity to establish a political and military presence in a Sunni-majority country amid the chaos of civil war. Today, ISIS has an estimated 7,000 to 10,000 fighters in Syria.

ISIS emerged amid deepening sectarianism in Syria and worldwide Sunni Muslim anger at the minority-led regime's treatment of their coreligionists. Most Syrian fighters were not politically active before the revolution, however, nor did they have strong, coherent ideologies or belief systems. Many still do not. Outgunned, trapped, and essentially abandoned by the international community, they are naturally drawn to the groups that win battles and pay salaries. This is a direct result of jihadists' superior access to financing, weapons, and skilled fighters, as compared with the Syrian nationalist opposition.

As its name indicates, ISIS sees itself as a state rather than an insurgency. It considers anyone unwilling to submit to it an outlaw, including civilians and other rebel groups. Therefore, ISIS and the regime have similar views of opposition groups; they are not partners in a common political cause or project, or even enemies to come to terms with, but rather rogue elements to be subjugated or eliminated. This places it at odds with Syrian opposition forces across a broad ideological spectrum, which includes nationalists affiliated with the US-supported Free Syrian Army, moderate Islamist groups backed by US allies such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and even hardline Salafi militants. As a result, Syrian rebel groups are now in a full-blown war with ISIS, a war they are not winning.

ISIS benefits greatly from the single most important tool in the Syrian conflict: money. Through its control of oil resources in the east, border crossings, extortion and criminal networks extending into Iraq, and private funding from sympathizers abroad, ISIS can galvanize financial support amid great adversity. Money, in turn, allows ISIS to pay for fighters and weapons and to co-opt locals. ISIS enjoys a financial advantage over many, if not all, the other rebel groups in Syria, including the Free Syrian Army banner brigades.

Spectrum of Militant Trends in Syria



ISIS' emphasis on building a state in relatively remote territory makes it less of a priority target for the Syrian regime, which concentrates its military efforts on the key front lines of Homs, Aleppo, Damascus, and other central provinces dominated by ISIS' rebel rivals. Thus, while the regime constantly bombs and besieges other rebel-held territories, it permits a sense of normalcy and continuity in ISIS-held territories. The fact that ISIS does not face the same regime attacks is an important reason it is able to establish its order and advance its political goals.

None of ISIS' strengths makes it all-powerful, however. In fact, each of the belligerents in Syria are quite weak in absolute terms, including the nationalist Free Syrian Army, moderate Islamist groups, ISIS, and indeed the Syrian regime and Hezbollah. Thus, it is not difficult for a group with ISIS' resources to survive. This also means that an empowered and well-supported Syrian opposition, including nationalists and moderate Islamists, could seriously weaken ISIS.

False Solutions

Some US policymakers and opinion-shapers advocate supporting the regime as the lesser of two evils compared with ISIS, as former US Ambassador to Syria Ryan Crocker argued in December 2013.² Subscribers to this view perceive Assad as an ally, not a threat to US interests. Others advocate tolerating or helping perpetuate a stalemate in Syria that allows Sunni and Shia extremists from ISIS and Hezbollah to kill off one

another. Some policymakers are also tempted to treat ISIS' rise exclusively as a terrorism problem to be addressed solely through targeted kinetic US operations. All these strategies, however, would exacerbate and perpetually recreate the jihadist threat in Syria and Iraq.

Assad Is Not the Answer

The Syrian uprising is the product of a fundamentally dysfunctional and unjust political order, which the Syrian regime built over decades of repression, economic failure, social injustice, and ideological hollowness. The regime is more an organized criminal enterprise than a state, defended by a narrow sectarian elite, and ruling over a brutalized population in economic and social despair. ISIS would not exist if the regime had even a few redeeming qualities or had treated Syria's population less brutally.

If the regime survives, stripped by the war to its criminal-militia essence, it will only perpetuate the very conditions that gave rise to ISIS. Indeed, the same qualities that have allowed the regime to survive three years of war—manipulation of sectarian fears, a cult of violence and leader worship, and cohesiveness based on shared complicity in atrocities—are the defining characteristics of ISIS. As Frederic Hof, who served as then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's special adviser for the transition in Syria until 2012, describes it, "It is not that [Assad] is better or worse than al-Qaeda in Syria. He is the flip side of the same debased coin."³

2 Ryan C. Crocker, "Assad Is the Least Worst Option," *New York Times*, December 21, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/12/21/for-peace-in-syria-will-assad-have-to-stay/assad-is-the-least-worst-option-in-syria>.

3 Frederic C. Hof, "Syria: Is the Revolution Finished?," *MENASource* (blog), Atlantic Council, May 15, 2014, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/syria-is-the-revolution-finished>.

The regime is not interested in defeating ISIS and, in fact, deliberately allowed it to build a state in the impoverished, hostile parts of Syria it sees as not worth controlling. The regime's fight is focused not on ISIS, but on the Sunni-led moderate rebel groups that alone are capable of providing a decent alternative to ISIS' narrow, intolerant version of Islam.

A Spawning Ground for Extremism

In addition to the "lesser-of-two-evils" argument, some analysts and US officials claim that the war between the Assad regime, Iran, and Hezbollah on one side and Sunni jihadist militias on the other is not necessarily bad for the United States. Indeed, having Sunni and Shia extremists kill off one another may be the best way to deal with the jihadist problem. The argument, reportedly put forth by White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough, has a certain crude logic.⁴ But Syria is not an arena in which preexisting, loitering extremists can go to die. These jihadists are the product of the civil war itself and the deeply sectarian character the regime gave it.

Rather than disappear, the jihadists are very much alive, emerging from the war more capable, committed, resourced, organized, and experienced than ever.⁵ Syria's war is not a black hole for violent extremists, but a spawning and training ground for them that will continue to captivate the imaginations and energies of jihadists worldwide. A containment strategy that seeks to trap ISIS in Syria and hope that the threat burns out is misconceived. ISIS's stunning successes in Iraq are proof that the extremist threat in Syria is not local and self-consuming; it is global and self-perpetuating.

The Limits of Counterterrorism

The Obama administration cannot successfully address the ISIS threat solely through counterterrorism measures such as assassinations and drone strikes. For one, it is unclear that the United States can identify and target individuals who pose a clear, imminent threat to its security given the hyperlocal nature of the war, the complexity of the insurgent landscape, and the lack of strong US allies who can provide substantive, reliable intelligence. This means it will have to rely on so-called signature strikes based on "suspicious" behavior

4 Mark Mazzetti, Robert F. Worth, and Michael R. Gordon, "Obama's Uncertain Path amid Syria Bloodshed," *New York Times*, October 22, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/23/world/middleeast/obamas-uncertain-path-amid-syria-bloodshed.html?ref=world&r=2&pagewanted=all&utm_content=buffer5bb71&utm_source=buffer&utm_medium=twitter&utm_campaign=Buffer&.

5 Hezbollah is another US enemy that has benefited from the war, gaining valuable experience, training, and recruits through its fighting on the regime's side.

patterns. Given the sheer noise and opacity of the war environment, acting on such information will inevitably lead to the frequent inadvertent killing of both Syrian civilians and moderate rebel fighters. This would boost jihadist recruitment and implicate the US-aligned moderate opposition in killing Syrians, effectively destroying it. Most worrying, a narrow counterterrorism strategy would also ruin a precious opportunity to exploit rebel discontent with ISIS, including among other Islamist groups, by causing them to rally against the United States

In his recent West Point commencement speech, President Obama announced a \$5 billion counterterrorism partnership fund. Part of this would go toward bolstering the counterterrorism capabilities of Syria's neighbors, presumably to fight jihadists along and within their borders. Unless this initiative aims to strengthen Syria's moderate opposition, it will not stop ISIS, and may well strengthen it if recipients of this aid are given free rein to pursue narrow counterterrorism policies. As US-backed Iraqi and Lebanese security forces have shown, military action by Syria's neighbors can contribute to ISIS' appeal and recruitment by alienating local Sunni populations and reinforcing the narrative of Sunni persecution. If the fund is to have any lasting impact, the United States should devise a more ambitious, comprehensive strategy to defeat ISIS.

AS US-BACKED IRAQI AND LEBANESE SECURITY FORCES HAVE SHOWN, MILITARY ACTION BY SYRIA'S NEIGHBORS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO ISIS' APPEAL AND RECRUITMENT BY ALIENATING LOCAL SUNNI POPULATIONS AND REINFORCING THE NARRATIVE OF SUNNI PERSECUTION.

A Comprehensive Strategy against ISIS
The more effective way to address the ISIS threat is to tackle it at multiple levels by stemming recruitment, enlisting allied support, improving local moderate opposition governance and control of resources, and shifting the military balance between the moderate opposition and regime in Syria. Only funding, training, and arming vetted rebel groups can simultaneously

address all these elements of an effective strategy against ISIS.

Viable US Partners

Before doing more to strengthen the moderate opposition, the United States must be able to distinguish potential allies from enemies. When assessing the rebel landscape, it must recognize that the field of candidates for US support is in flux. New rebel coalitions continue to emerge; some display an ideological flexibility that makes determining their true beliefs complicated. Groups that at first appear radical may simply be trying to boost their credentials with other rebels, appease foreign supporters, or increase access to weapons and funding; frequently, their only absolute goal is defeating the regime. Gaining their trust requires a period of relationship-building, including extended cooperation and US support.

WHEN ASSESSING THE FIELD OF CANDIDATES, THE UNITED STATES MUST ALSO PLACE REBEL ACTIONS, STATEMENTS, AND BELIEFS IN SYRIA'S WIDER SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXTS. NOT ALL MODERATE SYRIANS ARE SECULAR; NOT ALL DEVOUT SYRIANS ARE ISLAMISTS; AND NOT ALL ISLAMISTS POSE A THREAT TO THE UNITED STATES.

For example, the Islamic Front, a large and important coalition of several fighting groups spanning a broad Islamist spectrum, initially appeared antithetical to US interests and values. But in May 2014, the Islamic Front issued a statement unequivocally denouncing extremism and foreign fighters' presence in Syria, and committing itself to pluralism and tolerance, which elicited serious criticism from jihadist groups. The group's sincerity may be questioned, but the statement is a potent example of rebel attitudes' malleability, which should be leveraged against jihadists.

When assessing the field of candidates, the United States must also place rebel actions, statements, and beliefs in Syria's wider social and political contexts.

Not all moderate Syrians are secular; not all devout Syrians are Islamists; and not all Islamists pose a threat to the United States. Few Syrians would meet the criteria for Western liberal secularism but this simply reflects the devout character of Syrian Muslim society, particularly in the deeply impoverished rural and suburban heartlands of the revolution. Many fighters join whatever groups are active, capable, and well-equipped in their neighborhoods or towns, reflecting the hyperlocal, fragmented nature of the conflict.

These nuances do not imply that the United States ought to partner with all groups that fight ISIS. Some groups, such as Jabhat al-Nusra, share ISIS' ideology. Other groups would likely meet the threshold of what is acceptable ideology for the United States, such as a yet undetermined, vague role for Islam in Syrian politics. The point is not that the United States should endorse Islamism in Syria. The particular political character of a liberated Syria is for Syrians to decide, and it will surely be a long, tortuous process of bargaining, fighting, and learning. The best the United States can do is help prevent the worst possible outcome, which is currently playing out with the rise of ISIS.

Securing the Cooperation of Allies

Regional allies have a critical role to play against ISIS, but the United States needs to engage with them in a manner that advances rather than ignores their interests. This means going beyond pressuring them to crack down on ISIS' financial networks and fighter flows by committing to an outcome in Syria that benefits both them and the United States: empowering a moderate opposition to bring about a political transition.

Iraq and Lebanon are critical actors, but neither can help defeat ISIS. Lebanon is a state in name only and a base for Hezbollah, to which Lebanon's weak security forces are deferential. Hezbollah's alliance with the Syrian regime is contributing enormously to Sunni Muslim resentment, thereby reinforcing ISIS' narrative of Shia oppression of Sunnis. Meanwhile, in Iraq, the Shia-dominated government led by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is boosting ISIS' appeal through its heavy-handed treatment of Iraqi Sunnis and by recruiting Shia militias to fight Sunni groups. Iraq's Shia-dominated security forces are deeply sectarian and, as shown by ISIS' rapid progress in Iraq, not particularly effective in combat. Al-Maliki's apparent willingness to subcontract a sectarian war to Shia militias further proves that he is a cause of, rather than an antidote to, the jihadist problem.

Turkey's influence in and border with northern Syria, where ISIS is based, makes it a critical player. Many foreign jihadists, for example, enter Syria from Turkey. The United States should pressure Turkey to disrupt these fighter flows, but that task is difficult because the border is long and porous, and adjacent Syrian territory constantly changes hands. Additionally, Turkey may tolerate just enough jihadist activity in northern Syria to avoid retaliatory ISIS attacks in its territory. If the United States wants greater cooperation from Turkey, it must help secure core Turkish interests by strengthening allies in the moderate opposition who will fight and defeat jihadist groups that ultimately threaten Turkey's security.

Jordan's capable security and intelligence services allow it to contribute substantially in strengthening moderate rebels. By generally preventing extremists from entering southern Syria from Jordan, it has helped keep ISIS weak there. If the United States truly commits to helping the moderate opposition win in Syria, Jordan can and would provide a base for training, arming, and financing allied rebel groups.

The Gulf Arab states share the United States' desire to defeat ISIS, which accuses them of cooperating with the West to oppress Muslims. Yet much of ISIS' private funding comes from or through well-established Gulf-based religious institutions and wealthy individuals sympathetic to ISIS' cause. A crackdown on them by Gulf governments would carry substantial political and social costs and risk a terrorist blowback. These states resent the Obama administration's inaction against the Syrian regime, so they will not take such risks without an ironclad US commitment to weakening the Syrian regime and defeating ISIS in Syria. The United States can and should use its partnership with them much more effectively. If Gulf governments were convinced that the United States would provide robust, sustained support to moderate Syrian groups, they would be far better positioned to cooperate on intelligence support, financing for jihadists, and outreach to rebel groups.

Addressing the Resource Imbalance

Over the last six months, Syrian nationalist groups have proven their commitment to fighting ISIS, at great cost in resources and manpower, and against tremendous odds under the regime's bombing and starvation campaigns. They do this not to help the United States, but because they believe it is in Syrians' fundamental interest to defeat ISIS. This makes the Syrian nationalist opposition the ideal ally against ISIS, but it cannot win without substantially greater US support.

For one, moderate rebels simply cannot match either the regime or ISIS' resources, much less both combined. The immediate US priority is therefore to address this resource imbalance. Weapons, money, and ammunition are necessary to give moderate groups breathing room and capacity to kill ISIS fighters and leaders, attract recruits away from it, recapture ISIS-controlled resources including oil infrastructure, co-opt tribes in northern and eastern Syria, and capture critical jihadist-controlled border areas and crossings. The United States cannot—and should not—do this alone. Jordan, Turkey, and Gulf security and intelligence services are well placed to help realize these objectives.

Countering Regime Air Strikes

The moderate opposition would benefit immediately from greater resources, but it cannot defeat ISIS just by outgunning and outspending it. At its root, ISIS is the result of moderate rebels' inability to consolidate control of liberated territory, due to constant regime bombing and siege. ISIS exploits this relentless pressure to capture territory from other rebel groups, kidnap or kill their fighters, disrupt their supply lines, and brutalize civilians. ISIS' opponents cannot fight it if they are subjected to constant regime air strikes while Assad leaves ISIS unmolested to build its state.

AT ITS ROOT, ISIS IS THE RESULT OF MODERATE REBELS' INABILITY TO CONSOLIDATE CONTROL OF LIBERATED TERRITORY, DUE TO CONSTANT REGIME BOMBING AND SIEGE.

The moderate opposition must be able to establish order in its territories, from which it can build up its capacity to effectively fight ISIS. This means ending the daily mass killing of Syrians by regime airstrikes. To do so the rebels need effective anti-aircraft weapons. FSA banner groups and moderate fighting coalitions such as Harakat Hazm have proven reliable handlers and keepers of weapons supplied by regional allies with US approval.⁶ They are potentially suitable candidates for a trial run of man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS), which are used to shoot down low-flying aircraft.

⁶ Jeffrey White, "Rebels Worth Supporting: Syria's Harakat Hazm," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 28, 2014, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/rebels-worth-supporting-syrias-harakat-hazm>.

The administration is rightly concerned about the weapons falling into the wrong hands—namely, jihadist ones. However, the US government has sophisticated technology that can help mitigate that risk by tracking and disabling weapons if necessary.⁷ Critically, it can also ensure recipients have the broader military capability to protect their weapons and territory from capture. This risk cannot be eliminated altogether, but a greater one already exists: unchecked regime airstrikes are threatening to destroy the moderate insurgency, while allowing jihadist groups to grow unopposed and eventually acquire MANPADS and other sensitive weapons from within or outside Syria.

THE ONLY LONG-TERM ANTIDOTE TO ISIS IS A FUNCTIONAL, FAIR POLITICAL ORDER IN SYRIA—ONE THAT IS NOT BUILT ON A MINORITY-LED GANGSTER STATE’S INDEFINITE REPRESSION OF SYRIAN SUNNIS.

To defeat ISIS, the moderate opposition needs money, ammunition, small arms, and anti-armor weapons as well. Additionally, although the members of these opposition groups are increasingly able to coordinate sophisticated operations, they still need training and tactical and strategic guidance. These efforts need to be scaled and sped up—the current US program to train vetted rebel groups is much too slow and small. The United States can use this support to increase leverage over potential allies while deepening the relationships needed for a better understanding of rebel groups’ agendas. That would also help minimize risks associated with supplying more sensitive weapons such as MANPADS.

US efforts should certainly include helping moderate rebels in the south, where ISIS is weak. The southern frontlines of Daraa and Quneitra pose a threat to regime control of the capital. Rebel gains in the south would draw regime resources away from the north and east, relieving pressure on moderates there and allowing them to concentrate on fighting ISIS in their strongholds in Aleppo, Raqqa, and Deir al-Zour provinces.

⁷ John Reed, “Tracking Chips and Kill Switches for MANPADS,” *Foreign Policy*, October 19, 2012, http://complex.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/10/19/tracking_chips_and_kill_switches_for_manpads.

Conclusion

Only Syrian moderates can defeat ISIS, provided the United States supports them by:

- forging a strategy with Turkey to provide moderate fighting groups in northern and eastern Syria with training, material, and intelligence support, and to block jihadist fighter flows;
- partnering with Jordanian and Gulf governments to gather and analyze intelligence on the rebel landscape, deepen relations with moderate rebels, and give them substantial material and training support, while disrupting Gulf-based funding for extremists and jihadist fighter flows from Jordan;
- addressing the imbalance of financial and military resources between moderate rebels and ISIS by expediting and scaling up training, financing, and weapons provision through tightly controlled mechanisms in partnership with regional allies;
- providing weapons to moderate fighters that allow them to defend against regime airstrikes, freeing resources to fight ISIS; and
- pushing to replace Nouri al-Maliki with a less divisive and sectarian leader once the immediate ISIS threat to Baghdad is neutralized.

The only long-term antidote to ISIS is a functional, fair political order in Syria—one that is not built on a minority-led gangster state’s indefinite repression of Syrian Sunnis. Only Syrian moderates can build that Syria. Without US support however, they cannot govern liberated territory, protect civilians, fight and negotiate on their behalf, or defeat ISIS. The only lasting guarantee against well-armed jihadists in Syria threatening the United States is a well-armed moderate opposition that can finally offer Syrians an alternative to the tyrannies of the Assad regime and ISIS.

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