

Alliances and Smart Power

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

Alliances and Smart Power, by Major Kevin Caesar, US Army, 55 pages

This monograph focuses on the historical relationship between Syria and the United States. It briefly discusses the challenges created by past US administrations and how they have built roadblocks to achieving a political settlement to the Syrian Civil War. This monograph will accomplish this by analyzing Syrian and American relations through the instruments of national power in the application of smart power. In so doing, use the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action as a framework for implementing the three-track proposal by the Trump administration as a solution to the Syrian Civil War.

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Introduction

Models of the war's causality have often expressed contemporary international relations. During the Cold War and the division of the world into two, there was a tendency to view international relations before 1914 as bipolar, and divided between two rigidly separated and rival blocs in which power, prestige, and security were key determinants; and in which emphasis was placed on the alliance system in the war's causes. Analysis turned on how far war was accidental (or 'system generated') and how far it was willed by governments.

– John Horne

For decades, relations with Syria have proven to be a challenge for US foreign policy; however, the current situation is unparalleled. The situation in Syria is unpredictable, and there are insufficient access and information available for American policymakers to develop a sustainable strategy. America and its key allies, specifically Britain and France, have pursued measures to change the behavior of the Assad regime. These measures include providing support to groups opposed to President al-Assad and assistance to nations impacted by the outflow of refugees. During this period, the international community has accused the Assad regime of using chemical weapons on multiple occasions to quell protests and rebel activity, which have resulted in a civil war.¹

In 2013, the British and French governments claimed the Assad regime used chemicals, killing an estimated 1,400 citizens.² In September 2013, President Obama requested through Congress to use military force to deter President al-Assad from using chemical weapons again.³ Congress debated the merits of the case but eventually denied the request.⁴ Additional appeals for military

¹ Kathy Gilsinan, "A Brief Guide to the Syrian Civil War - The Atlantic," The Atlantic, last modified 2015, accessed February 1, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/10/syrian-civil-war-guide-isis/410746/>.

² Carla E. Humud, "Syria Conflict Overview : 2011-2018," *Congressional Research Report for Congress* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2019), last modified 2019, accessed January 8, 2020, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11080>.

³ The White House, "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria," last modified 2013, accessed February 1, 2020, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/10/remarks-president-address-nation-syria>.

⁴ Humud, *Syria Conflict Overview*: 2011-2018.

action were averted when the Syrian government accepted a Russian-American plan for Syria to surrender its chemical weapons stockpiles and become a member of the Chemical Weapons Convention.⁵ While this increased hope of normalizing Syria's behavior on the world stage, it was short-lived. The change in behavior was brief because, in April 2017 and April 2018, the Assad regime used chemical weapons in the rebel-controlled towns of Khan Sheikhoun and Douma, respectively.⁶ The Assad regime's erratic behavior led the United States to resort to hard power methods: economic sanctions and military force, to coerce an end to the civil war, and to bring increased stability in the region.

Actions such as these raise serious concerns about Syria's stability in the Middle East and their threat to oil concessions.⁷ Given the importance of security in the region and the events discussed above by the Syrian government, demonstrate why America must work in concert with its allies in deterring Syrian aggression and support the Trump administration's three-track strategy to resolve the challenges posed by the Assad regime.⁸ In so doing, attempt to prevent the Syrian civil war from extending beyond its borders and destabilizing the region with the dangers posed by foreign fighters and the flow of refugees.

The *National Security Strategy* defines the US approach towards the Middle East by encouraging sustainable political and economic stability.⁹ The stability of the Middle East is

⁵ Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, "Syria's Accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention Enters into Force," last modified 2013, accessed February 1, 2020, <https://www.opcw.org/media-centre/news/2013/10/syrias-accession-chemical-weapons-convention-enters-force>.

⁶ Humud, *Syria Conflict Overview: 2011-2018*.

⁷ Washington's Blog, "Middle Eastern Wars Have Always Been About Oil," last modified 2020, accessed February 1, 2020, <https://www.globalresearch.ca/middle-eastern-wars-have-always-been-about-oil/5510640>.

⁸ Carla E. Humud, Christopher M. Blanchard, and Mary Beth D. Nikitin, "Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response," *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2019), last modified 2019, accessed January 8, 2020, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL33487>.

⁹ The White House, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America" (Washington, DC: The National Security Council, 2017), last modified 2017, accessed February 20, 2020, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905-2.pdf>.

essential; it is at the junction of commercial air and sea travel between Africa, Asia, and Europe. The Middle East is also a global energy focal point, a lynchpin of international financial networks, and a crossroads for human migration. American prosperity and security improve when this part of the world is more stable, peaceful, and prosperous.¹⁰ The US strategy towards Syria is to “seek a settlement that sets the conditions for refugees to return home and rebuild their lives in safety.”¹¹ The plan for Syria is a political one and includes all the instruments of national power. The approach will require the support of Syria’s closest allies, Iran and Russia. The plan must require lifting of economic sanctions, as a show of good faith and dialogue to decide how to bring the fragmented country back together.

Since 2011, the United States has engaged Syria primarily with hard power tactics by using economic sanctions and military force to bring an end to the conflict. The President of the United States in the *National Security Strategy* advocates for the use of diplomacy. The document highlights how diplomacy initiates and synchronizes the informational, military, and economic instruments of national power.¹² The synchronization of these instruments can lead America and its allies to the effective use of smart power towards Syria. Richard Armitage and Joseph Nye define smart power as “a way to formulate an integrated strategy, resource base, and tool kit to achieve American objectives, drawing on both hard and soft power. It is an approach that underscores the necessity of a strong military, but also invests heavily in alliances, partnerships, and institutions at all levels to expand American influence and establish the legitimacy of American action.”¹³ The use of smart power is critical to the implementation of the Trump

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Richard Lee Armitage and Joseph S. Nye, “CSIS Commission on Smart Power: A Smarter, More Secure America,” *CSIS Commission on Smart Power* (Washington, DC: CSIS Press, 2007), last modified 2007, accessed February 2, 2020, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/media/csis/pubs/071106_csissmartpowerreport.pdf.

administration's three-track strategy with the diplomatic instrument orchestrating the elements of national power to build an alliance to achieve a political settlement with the Assad regime.

Literature Review

Over the past thirty years, there are numerous academic research papers, articles, and books that have analyzed the Syrian and American relationships. Recent studies focus their analysis on the Syrian Civil War and how America should approach the threat to the region. This work used research from the Center for Naval Analysis, Centre for Global Research, Congressional Research Services, Danish Institute for International Studies, House of Commons, Information Housing Services (IHS) Markit, and Department of State to produce this monograph. The research from these sources concentrates on the use of the diplomatic, informational, military, and economic instruments of national power, but not as smart power to solve the Syrian conflict.

Over the past decade, various parties have attempted to organize a way forward to a political settlement to the Syrian Civil War. One path is the Geneva Process, and the other is the Astana Process. Collectively the two processes make up the Syrian peace process, which is an ensemble of initiatives and plans to bring an end to the Syrian Civil War.¹⁴ However, many foreign policy experts doubt there will be a successful diplomatic solution in the near term.¹⁵ Middle East analysts Carla E. Humud and Christopher M. Blanchard of the Congressional Research Services assess that calls for President al-Assad to step aside are no longer an option. The call for President al-Assad to leave office has been the US position since 2011, preferably

¹⁴ Victoria Wiebe, Abby Hershberger, and Senéad Short, "The Syrian Peace Process," last modified 2019, accessed February 2, 2020, <https://mcc.org/stories/syrian-peace-process>.

¹⁵ Lara Seligman and Colum Lynch, "As Assad Gains Ground, New Syria Peace Talks in Geneva Offer Little Hope for a Political Solution," *Foreign Policy*, last modified 2019, accessed February 2, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/12/as-assad-gains-ground-new-syria-talks-offer-little-hope-of-peace/>.

through a negotiated peace settlement.¹⁶ The ability to broker an agreement is further strained by sanctions that were in place before the start of the current conflict.

The Syrian government – backed by the Russian and Iranian governments – have made efforts to topple the regime difficult. With a realist approach to the situation in Syria, in 2018, senior Trump administration officials stated that while “America will never have good relations with Bashar Al-Assad, the Syrian people ultimately get to decide who will lead them and what kind of a government they will have. We seek behavior change and not regime change.”¹⁷ Because the Trump administration no longer seeks regime change, the focus now is on reaching a negotiated settlement under United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254.¹⁸

In studies conducted by IHS Markit, analysts assess that President Bashar al-Assad is winning the civil war and is committed to re-establishing control over Syria.¹⁹ The support of the Russian and Iranian governments makes it likely the Baathist administration and President al-Assad will endure and remain in power. To this end, governments interested in President al-Assad stepping aside, to include the United States, will be inclined to compromise over the Syrian president’s future in Syria.

This monograph benefited the most from the Foreign Relations of United States series produced by the Department of State’s Office of the Historian. The series provides the official documentary historical record of major United States foreign policy decisions and significant diplomatic activity. The series also offers documents from the Departments of Defense and State, Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Council, Presidential libraries, and other foreign affairs agencies involved in formulating US foreign policy.

¹⁶ Humud, Blanchard, and Nikitin, “*Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response.*”

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Information Housing Services (IHS) Markit, *Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment - Eastern Mediterranean* (London, England, 2019), 1.

Research for this monograph revealed many works focused primarily on the elements of hard power to coerce the Assad regime into a negotiated settlement. The study did not discover a US strategy that combined hard and soft power elements of smart power towards the Assad regime. This work will discuss the implementation of the instruments of national power with the primary focus on the diplomatic instrument as the preeminent orchestrator of the instruments in building alliances into effective use of smart power towards Syria.

Organization and Methodology

This monograph has three sections. The first section contains a brief historical overview of Syrian and American relations before the First World War to the present. This section discusses how the Syrian government views events that are crucial to their political development and explains how Syrian attitudes toward the US government changed from admiration to anger over the first half of the twentieth century. The second section analyzes smart power in its application of the diplomatic, informational, military, and economic instruments of national power against Syria by the United States. The second section argues that US foreign policy in the past decade has been effective when the diplomatic instrument has synchronized efforts in building alliances to achieve the political aims of the United States. The work concludes with an analysis of how the United States can make a breakthrough in the Syrian conflict by using the instruments of national power in the application of smart power to reach a political solution.

Historical Background

The boundaries of present-day Syria represent only a portion of ancient geographical Syria. During the twentieth century, Western powers began to carve out the rough contours of the contemporary states of Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria. The settled region at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea was called Syria, the name given by the ancient Greeks to the land bridge

that links three continents.²⁰ The collection of these four states is usually referred to by historians and political scientists as Greater Syria.

Greater Syria, due to its geographic location, was the battleground and a prized possession for empires because of the fertile soil and lumber used to build imperial fleets before the industrial age.²¹ A recurrent theme of Syria's history is the encounters between Western and Eastern powers on its soil. Much in the ancient period, it was the focus of a continual conflict, where Christian Crusaders battled Muslim Arabs for land, they both held sacred. Since independence in 1946, two overarching factors dominate Syria's history. The first factor is the deeply held desire among Syrian Arabs – both Christian and Muslim – to unify with the other Arabs in the Middle East. The second factor is the dislike for Israel, the creation of which Syrians feel was forced upon them by Western powers and which they perceive as a threat to Arab unification.²²

Syria and the United States have never known each other well. The two states have managed their relationship through a third party, ever since the Arab-Israeli War of 1948.²³ Almost every American administration tried to find its policy towards Syria, often bringing relations back to step one. World events have impacted assumptions each country has about the other, particularly after the United States labeled Syria as a State Sponsor of Terrorism on December 29, 1979.²⁴ Since the tragic events of September 11, 2003, the “War on Terror”

²⁰ Thomas Collelo, *Syria: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1988), accessed January 23, 2020, https://cdn.loc.gov/master/frd/frdstudy/sy/syriacountrystud00coll_0/syriacountrystud00coll_0.pdf, 3.

²¹ Ibid, 3-4.

²² Ibid, 220-227.

²³ Sami M. Moubayed, *Syria and the USA : Washington's Relations with Damascus from Wilson to Eisenhower* (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2012), iii.

²⁴ “State Sponsors of Terrorism - United States Department of State,” last modified 2020, accessed February 4, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/state-sponsors-of-terrorism/>.

became the foundation of American foreign policy, differences between Syria and the United States have appeared irreconcilable. The invasion of Iraq, Syria's backing of Lebanon against Israel, and Syria's unshakeable alliances with Iran and Russia mean that Syria stands in the way of most American interests in the Middle East.

Before the Second World War

Before 1919, the word "Arab" had never been spoken in public by an American president – and indeed not the name "Syria."²⁵ Apart from second-generation Arabs who lived and worked in the United States, no American leader had ever met an Arab residing outside of the United States.²⁶ Other than the missionaries who went to the Middle East during the nineteenth century, no senior US official had been to the Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire.²⁷ President Woodrow Wilson – an educator by training – was the first United States president to meet face-to-face with an Arab.²⁸

On October 3, 1918, the soon-to-be Emir of Syria, Faisal I bin Hussein bin Ali al-Hashemi, after a successful campaign with the British Army during the Arab Revolt traveled to Syria.²⁹ Faisal, born in Mecca, knew Syria well, having made frequent visits to the country. Despite opposition from local leaders who viewed Faisal as an import, his passion and boldness appeared to make him the ideal leader for a people whose desire was to lead the Arab world.

Now that the First World War was over, Hussein ibn Ali ordered his politically inexperienced son, Faisal, to Paris to meet with the British who promised Hussein a kingdom to rule in the Arab

²⁵ The first United States president to mention Syria in public was Dwight Eisenhower during a press conference on strained bilateral relations on August 21, 1957. Moubayed, *Syria and the USA : Washington's Relations with Damascus from Wilson to Eisenhower*, 5.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Thomas Collelo, *Syria: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1988), 16.

²⁸ Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition: The Treaty Fight in Perspective*, Second. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 64-78.

²⁹ B. Schemmel, "Rulers," last modified 2020, accessed January 25, 2020, <http://rulers.org/index.html>.

world. As a condition for his support, Hussein wanted Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria to fall under his control.³⁰ Faisal arrived six weeks early for the conference in Paris to deliver his father's position on the agreement but was not recognized by the French to have any authority in any decisions.³¹ To keep the young royal entertained before the start of the conference, the British escorted him around Paris and London, where he briefly met the British foreign minister Arthur Balfour. The meeting was so brief that Faisal did not have the opportunity to discuss the fate of Jewish and Arab people in Palestine, given that the foreign minister's signature adorned the document granting the Jewish people a national home in Palestine.³²

While in Paris, Faisal realized that the French and British governments were determined to ensure their mandates were honored based on terms in the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration, granting the Jewish people a national home in Palestine.³³ Faisal first heard of the Sykes-Picot agreement after it was reported in two Russian newspapers: *Izvestia* and *Pravda*. Once the text of the documents became public and made available to the Arab press, the Arab world became incensed. Somehow, the French and British were able to assuage the situation and convince Emir Faisal they would honor the agreement.³⁴ At the conference, Faisal was able to address the Council of Ten and demand self-rule for Syria.³⁵ During the presentation, the French pushed back and told Faisal that he was not welcome, and he had no authority to speak on behalf of the people of Syria.

³⁰ Moubayed, *Syria and the USA : Washington's Relations with Damascus from Wilson to Eisenhower*, 7.

³¹ Malcolm B. Russell, *The First Modern Arab State: Syria under Faysal, 1918-1920* (Ann Arbor, MI: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1985), 31-32.

³² Ibid.

³³ "The Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916)," *Jewish Virtual Library*, accessed February 8, 2020, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-sykes-picot-agreement-1916>.

³⁴ Moubayed, *Syria and the USA : Washington's Relations with Damascus from Wilson to Eisenhower*, 9.

³⁵ "Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, The Paris Peace Conference, 1919, Volume III - Office of the Historian," *Foreign Relations of the United States*, last modified 1919, accessed February 8, 2020, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1919Parisv03/d61>.

Also, while at the conference, Faisal met President Woodrow Wilson, where he was able to pass him a copy of his speech. The presence of the American president, the first to leave his country to attend an international event, signaled the US growing interest in world affairs.³⁶

The Arab world was captivated by President Wilson's Fourteen Points in which he outlined the principles of peace for use in peace negotiations to end the First World War.³⁷ Due to the persuasiveness of President Wilson, he was able to form an Inter-Alliance Commission with Great Britain, France, and Italy to inquire about whether the Syrian people wanted a French mandate in territories liberated during the Arab Revolt. President Wilson stated, "If the people of Syria truly wanted independence, then I will not allow any country to control Syria!"³⁸

The admiration Faisal felt for President Wilson was misplaced. His praise was misplaced because, as a devout Christian, the American president believed in ancient biblical prophecies and was determined to see the Jewish people return to their holy land.³⁹ Unknown to Faisal, President Wilson had no regard for the thirteen centuries of Muslim presence in Palestine, and regardless of his pleas, the Balfour Declaration and the Sykes-Picot Agreement were going ahead.⁴⁰ During his time as president, Woodrow Wilson took two noteworthy actions that have had unintended consequences for the future of Palestine and America's role in the Middle East. His first action was support for the Balfour Declaration. The second action was the field inquiry by Henry King and Charles R. Crane into the former Ottoman territory to determine the wishes of the people in the region.

³⁶ Moubayed, *Syria and the USA : Washington's Relations with Damascus from Wilson to Eisenhower*, 10.

³⁷ " 'Fourteen Points Message', " *Teaching American History*, accessed February 8, 2020, <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/fourteen-points/>.

³⁸ Zeine N. Zeine, *The Struggle For Arab Independence: Western Diplomacy And The Rise And Fall Of Faisal's Kingdom In Syria*, (Los Angeles, CA: Khayat's, 1960), 249-250.

³⁹ Frank W Brecher, "Woodrow Wilson and the Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict," *American Jewish Archives Journal*, last modified 1987, accessed February 8, 2020, http://americanjewisharchives.org/publications/journal/PDF/1987_39_01_00_brecher.pdf.

⁴⁰ Moubayed, *Syria and the USA : Washington's Relations with Damascus from Wilson to Eisenhower*, 17-19.

After the British, French, Italian break from the Inter-Alliance Commission, President Wilson appointed two Americans to lead it. Under the guidance of Henry King and Charles R. Crane, the two men and other participants traveled to the areas of the former Ottoman Empire. The purpose of the mission was to determine the desires of the people of the region.⁴¹ These two Americans understood that support from the public matters and policy imposed without the consent of the affected people would not work, and could lead to armed conflict. After their mission was complete, the Shura Council presented their findings and recommended to King Hussein that all people controlled by the Ottoman Turks should become free. The Shura Council also endorsed a modification of the Zionist Program for Palestine of unlimited immigration of the Jewish people.⁴²

Faisal sensing the end coming, on March 8, 1920, declared himself King of Syria without consulting the world powers: America, Britain, and France.⁴³ After the declaration, French General Gouraud issued a warning to Emir Faisal and the Arab Army demanding that they turn over the railway to the French, disband the army, surrender Damascus and accept the French currency. The Emir and the Arab revolutionaries refused these terms. The Arab revolutionaries were at a disadvantage because it did not have tanks, airplanes, and heavy equipment. Despite the Arab Army's valiant efforts, the French forces prevailed.⁴⁴ After the defeat, speaking to the *Washington Post* on September 17, 1920, Emir Faisal, angered by the events, stated, "We counted on America! You laid down the principles of self-determination. You sent a commission to Syria last year, and our people flooded to its hearings to record their views. The commission found that we desire, passionately, independence!" Later speaking to an American diplomat in London, Emil Faisal added, "You have

⁴¹ Ken Grossi, Maren Milligan, and Ted Waddelow, "Restoring Lost Voices of Self-Determination," *King-Crane Commission Digital Collection*, last modified 2011, accessed February 8, 2020, <http://www2.oberlin.edu/library/digital/king-crane/intro.html>.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Moubayed, *Syria and the USA : Washington's Relations with Damascus from Wilson to Eisenhower*, 20.

⁴⁴ "Maysaloun Battle and the Syrian Kingdom," *Milestones List*, accessed February 9, 2020, <https://arabrevolt.jo/en/milestones-list/maysaloun-battle-and-the-syrian-kingdom/>.

pushed me into a ditch.”⁴⁵ Emir Faisal’s anger stemmed from an agreement he made with Chaim Weizmann, formally known as the Weizmann-Faisal Agreement, that was not binding, at least not the section related to Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish homeland.⁴⁶

In 1919, vast amounts of oil deposits were yet to be discovered, which explains the indifference displayed toward the Arabs during the Paris Peace Conference. However, things would change in 1949 when America wanted more involvement in Syrian affairs by protecting its economic and political interests in Damascus by getting the Syrian president to agree to permit pipelines to run from Saudi Arabia to Lebanon. Also, America wanted the Syrian government to sign a truce with the Israeli government for their help installing their new president, General Husni al-Zaim.⁴⁷

While oil may have jumped-started US interest in the Arab world, other factors, such as America’s entry in the Second World War and the fear of rising Nazi influence in Syria, got the relationship rolling.⁴⁸ The Nazi option – just as the Soviet option would become available during the Cold War – for the leaders of Syria when access to the White House was not an option.⁴⁹ One of the central figures who would attempt to orchestrate a potential Syrian-Nazi union was Hajj Amin al-Husseini, a Palestinian, who served as the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. When al-Husseini met with Adolf Hitler, he asked the German leader for a “public statement that recognized and sympathized with the struggle of the Arabs for independence and freedom, and that his nation would support the elimination of a national Jewish homeland.”⁵⁰ A German alliance with Syria would have been an

⁴⁵ Moubayed, *Syria and the USA : Washington’s Relations with Damascus from Wilson to Eisenhower*, 21.

⁴⁶ “Pre-State Israel: The Weizmann-Faisal Agreement,” *Jewish Virtual Library*, accessed February 9, 2020, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-weizmann-faisal-agreement-january-1919>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Chuck Morse, *The Nazi Connection to Islamic Terrorism: Adolf Hitler and Haj Amin Al-Husseini* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, Inc. , 2003), 43-46.

⁴⁹ Moubayed, *Syria and the USA : Washington’s Relations with Damascus from Wilson to Eisenhower*, 43.

⁵⁰ Morse, *The Nazi Connection to Islamic Terrorism Adolf Hitler and Haj Amin Al-Husseini*, 48.

obstacle to the Allied Powers during the war because of Syria's strategic location in the region. However, the attempt to turn Syria over to the Axis Powers failed during the Syrian-Lebanese campaign when an Anglo-French Army crushed the Vichy French in Damascus and ushered in a path for Syria to achieve its independence from France.⁵¹

After the Second World War

For the United States, the post-war status quo without Soviet encroachment represented stability, whereas, for the regional actors, the mandate system seemed to have been replaced by indirect Western control and the establishment of Israel. America's support for Israel in 1948 was a continuation of the tension between Syria and the United States – and erupted during the presidency of Harry Truman.⁵² After the Second World War ended, when all attempts failed to create a relationship with Presidents Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower, Syrian leadership turned to the Soviet Union in the middle of the 1950s.⁵³

The Syrian press followed the presidential race in 1952 between Dwight D. Eisenhower and Governor Adlai Stevenson with great interest. The race was of interest because the Syrian government was eager for a fresh start and to build a relationship with a new administration after the difficult years of previous administrations.⁵⁴ After the new administration took office, President Eisenhower dispatched Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to the Middle East to meet with the Syrian president Adib al-Shishakli. During the meeting, President Shishakli expressed hope that Israel would not poison the new administration. Unlike his predecessors, the Syrian president was a pragmatist and

⁵¹ Edward Louis Spears, *Fulfilment of a Mission: The Spears Mission to Syria and Lebanon, 1941-1944* (London, England: Archon Books, 1977), 1.

⁵² Milestones: 1945–1952, “Creation of Israel, 1948,” *Foreign Relations of the United States*, accessed February 11, 2020, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/creation-israel>.

⁵³ “Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1944, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, The Far East, Volume V - Department of State Office of the Historian,” accessed January 29, 2020, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1944v05/d610>.

⁵⁴ Moubayed, *Syria and the USA : Washington's Relations with Damascus from Wilson to Eisenhower*, 97.

new that annihilating Israel was not an option.⁵⁵ To this line of thought, Secretary Dulles replied, “What is possible is getting Israel to abide by United Nations resolutions.”⁵⁶ After returning to the United States, Secretary Dulles briefed the president that Syria “had some promise” because of its proximity to the Soviet Union, and it was more aware of the Soviet threat than other Arab countries.⁵⁷ Secretary Dulles further reported that the Syrian president might be open, with the right inducements, to receive Palestinian refugees as a “good start for liquidation of the problem which poisons Arab relations with the United States.”⁵⁸ Secretary Dulles noted that if the United States wanted to improve its image and build its credibility in the region with the Arabs, the United States should seek to change course concerning the Arab-Israeli Conflict. The Secretary of State’s recommendation led to a debate as to whether America’s foreign policy could balance a relationship with the Arab countries and Israel.⁵⁹

The Syrian president was eager to work with America but did not have the support of the Syrian population. The growing anti-western sentiment at home and the US support for Israel eventually sealed his fate. On February 25, 1954, President al- Shishakli resigned from office.⁶⁰ Seeing no way to retain its position through domestic maneuvering, the Syrian government turned to the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, for assistance. Talks about a union between Syria and Egypt were first held in 1956 but were interrupted by the Suez Canal crisis.⁶¹ The subject was

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 103.

⁵⁷ David W. Lesch, *Syria And The United States: Eisenhower’s Cold War In The Middle East*, First. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), 42.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 107.

⁶⁰ Bonnie F. Saunders, *The United States and Arab Nationalism: The Syrian Case, 1953-1960* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 1996), 24.

⁶¹ Department of State Office of the Historian, “The Suez Crisis, 1956,” *Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations*, accessed February 12, 2020, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/suez>.

broached again in December 1957, when the Ba'ath Party announced that it was drafting a bill for a union with Egypt. For his part, President Nasser was hesitant to saddle himself with a problematic Syria and agreed to the alliance only after a Syrian delegation convinced him of the seriousness of the Communist threat.⁶² It was in this regional context of western setbacks, emboldened Arab nationalism and Soviet intervention, that the Syrian-American crisis developed in 1957. The United States interpreted Syria's Ba'athist-Communist coalition during the Suez Crisis as the Communist domination of Syrian politics. The United States was further alarmed at the speed with which the Soviets were able to secure a Syrian alliance, and the damage it was capable of inflicting on western interests in the region.⁶³ Consequently, the United States realized it was no longer viable to take a passive approach to the internal affairs of Arab states. While in the past, the United States clandestinely supported individuals who were in search of power, the United States would now be willing to instigate domestic and regional opposition for the overthrow of a dangerous regime.⁶⁴

With the fear of Soviet intervention in the region, the United States publicly declared its new strategy with the Eisenhower Doctrine in March 1957. The Eisenhower Doctrine demanded alignment against "the East," not just the Soviet Union but its Arab allies as well. President Eisenhower stipulated that the United States would strengthen the internal security of any state threatened by "International Communism" and would provide military assistance against Communist aggression. The doctrine imposed a bipolar context onto local conflicts, recasting them as extensions of the Cold War.⁶⁵

⁶² Moubayed, *Syria and the USA : Washington's Relations with Damascus from Wilson to Eisenhower*, 140-143.

⁶³ Department of State Office of the Historian, "Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957, Near East Region," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957, Near East Region; Volume XII*, accessed February 12, 2020, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v12/pg_186.

⁶⁴ Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study in Post-War Arab Politics, 1945-1958* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 263-282.

⁶⁵ Foreign Service Institute Office of the Historian and United States Department of State, "The Eisenhower Doctrine, 1957," *Milestones: 1953–1960*, accessed January 30, 2020, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/eisenhower-doctrine>.

Between 1955 and 1958, at the height of the Cold War, Syria signed an agreement with the Soviet Union for military and economic aid and established formal diplomatic ties with China.⁶⁶ These agreements set the stage for coups and countercoups from 1961-1970 until Hafez al-Assad came to power and brought stability to the country. In a meeting in Ankara, Turkey, the Baghdad Pact countries, attended by senior United States Department of State officials, consented “the present regime in Syria had to go; otherwise, the takeover by the Communists would be complete.”⁶⁷ The Soviets warned the West against intervening in Syria. Known to many that the American and British governments were actively seeking regime change to stop Syria from moving into Moscow’s sphere of influence.⁶⁸ However, the full extent of their involvement and that it included assassinations are not known.⁶⁹ The goal was to replace the government that had the backing of the Ba’athists and Communist parties with one that was pro-Western. Such a regime would, the report documented, be disliked and “would probably need to rely primarily upon repressive measures and arbitrary exercise of power.”⁷⁰

Cold War to the Present

The Cold War was a standoff between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United States of America and her allies from 1947-1991. The relationship between Syria and Russia started in the 1950s, grew in the 1960s, and become more prominent during and after the Arab-Israeli War in 1973.⁷¹ The Soviet-Syrian alliance centered on, more than anything else, a mutual dislike towards

⁶⁶ From 1955 to 1958 Syria received about \$294 million from Moscow for military and economic assistance. Andrej Kreutz, *Russia in the Middle East: Friend or Foe?* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 13.

⁶⁷ Michael Brecher and Jonathan Wilkenfeld, *A Study of Crisis* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 345-346.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

⁷¹ Lesch, *Syria And The United States: Eisenhower’s Cold War In The Middle East*, 35.

America and Israel.⁷² During the Cold War, the Syrian government charted a realist and independent course. It maintained a close relationship with the Soviet Union, to ensure a sustained flow of Soviet military aid. At the same time, President Hafez al-Assad moved to improve Syrian relations with Jordan and with the United States and other Western nations. Syria's diplomatic ties with Britain and America that were once severed were restored in 1973 and 1974, respectively.⁷³

As the 1970s ended with an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, Syria found itself separated in the region. However, the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the emergence of the Islamic Republic provided Syria with a surprising ally.⁷⁴ Syria was the first state in the region to recognize the new Islamist regime and was the sole supporter of Iran during the Iranian hostage crisis. As a result, a long-term strategic alliance forged between the two states.⁷⁵ The hostility increased when the United States designated Syria as a state sponsor of terrorism and applied more significant sanctions on the regime. Syria's dependence on the Soviet Union continued into the 1980s. The Soviets resupplied the Syrian military with weapons, which concluded with the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation on October 8, 1980.⁷⁶ Since the Iran-Iraq War in 1980, Syria has aligned itself with Iran, to the irritation of the moderate Arab countries. Also, since 1982 Syria has been receiving a substantial amount of oil from Iran as repayment for its support and as compensation for the once-closed Iraqi oil pipeline, which runs through Syria.⁷⁷

⁷² "Arab Nationalism," *The Arab Israeli Conflict*, last modified 2020, accessed February 17, 2020, <http://israelpalestine.umwblogs.org/arab-nationalism/>.

⁷³ Kreutz, *Russia in the Middle East: Friend or Foe?*, 220.

⁷⁴ Daniel L. Byman, "Syria and Iran: What's Behind the Enduring Alliance?," *Brookings*, last modified 2006, accessed February 13, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/syria-and-iran-whats-behind-the-enduring-alliance/>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

"Syria, USSR Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation Which Remains in Force," *Sputnik International*, last modified 2015, accessed February 13, 2020, <https://sputniknews.com/middleeast/201509301027817141-Treaty-of-Friendship-Cooperation-Between-USSR-Syria-Which-Remains-in-Force/>.

⁷⁷ Collelo, *Syria: A Country Study*, 226.

President Reagan supported the May 17, 1983, Lebanese-Israeli accords and linked this peace treaty to his attempts to revive the Arab-Israeli peace process. However, Syria blocked the initiative, in part by inciting opposition to American policies among its surrogates in Lebanon.⁷⁸ The United States also suspected Syria of having a role in attacks on the United States Embassy and on the Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon. Syrian-American relations reached their lowest point in December 1983, when the two nations engaged in near warfare. On December 4, US aircraft carriers attacked Syrian antiaircraft installations in Lebanon's Biqa Valley, and on December 13 and 14, US warships shelled Syrian positions.⁷⁹

In June 1985, relations improved between Syria and the United States when Syria interceded on behalf of the United States after the hijacking of Trans World Airlines flight 847 headed to Beirut. President Reagan expressed his appreciation of Syria's role in securing the release of the hostages, albeit in guarded language. To some observers, Syria's ability to punish the hijackers confirmed Syria's links to terrorism.⁸⁰ In the lead up to the Gulf War, the United States sought Syria's help. The request marked a shift in Syrian-American relations.⁸¹ Syria's participation was strategic; it reflected a mix of a perceived principled necessity to further the Arab cause in the Arab-Israeli conflict and the need to be cautious about alienating America.⁸²

Since 2011, the Syrian conflict has presented significant policy challenges for the United States. The focus of US foreign policy and strategy, since 2014 towards the Assad regime, has primarily been economic sanctions and counterterrorism actions against the Islamic State operating in

⁷⁸ Uri Friedman, "The 'Peace Process': A Short History," *Foreign Policy*, last modified 2012, accessed February 13, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/02/27/the-peace-process-a-short-history/>.

⁷⁹ Micah Zenko, "When Reagan Cut and Run," *Foreign Policy*, last modified 2014, accessed February 13, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/02/07/when-reagan-cut-and-run/>.

⁸⁰ William E. Smith, "Terror Aboard Flight 847," *Time*, last modified 2001, accessed February 13, 2020, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,142099,00.html>.

⁸¹ David W. Lesch, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History*, (Oxford, England, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 38.

⁸² James A. Baker III, *The Politics of Diplomacy* (New York, NY: Putnam Adult, 1995), 297.

Syria and Iraq.⁸³ In 2018, the Trump administration began to articulate a three-track strategy seeking a political settlement to the civil war according to the terms outlined in the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254, expelling Iranian-commanded forces from Syria, and the defeat of the Islamic State. The strategy proposed by the administration combines elements of hard and soft power to offer a smart power solution. In so doing, this plan will permit the diplomatic instrument of national power to coordinate the informational, military, and economic instruments of national power.

Smart Power

Compared to the other regions of the world, there is no other region where the United States has lost more standing than in the Middle East.⁸⁴ In the 1990s, the perception of America was that of an effective mediator and guarantor of security. The continued collapse of negotiations of the Arab-Israeli peace process, the Gulf Wars, and conflict with Iran and Syria place greater scrutiny on US Middle East foreign policy.⁸⁵ Given these challenges, it has become more evident that the national security challenges facing the United States must have a multi-faceted approach in the application of smart power. Richard Armitage and Joseph Nye define smart power as “a way to formulate an integrated strategy, resource base, and tool kit to achieve American objectives, drawing on both hard and soft power.”⁸⁶ It is an approach that underscores the necessity of a strong military, but also invests heavily in alliances, partnerships, and institutions at all levels to expand American influence and establish the legitimacy of American action.”⁸⁷ The United States remains the world leader, but its leading role in the Middle East has

⁸³ Humud, Blanchard, and Nikitin, “*Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response.*”

⁸⁵ Richard Lee Armitage and Joseph S. Nye, *A Smarter, More Secure America* (Washington, DC.: CSIS Press, 2007).

⁸⁶ Armitage and Nye, “*CSIS Commission on Smart Power: A Smarter, More Secure America.*”

⁸⁷ Ibid.

dwindled. In 2015, the Obama administration used a dual-track approach – economic sanctions and engagement – to reach a nuclear deal with Iran.⁸⁸ The nuclear deal fell apart with the change of leadership in the White House and the US withdrawal from the agreement.⁸⁹

One of the glaring developments over the last decade is how Iran and Syria have become the two countries in the Middle East that are in outright opposition to the United States. When the civil war erupted in 2011 in Syria, the Obama administration advocated for regime change. Now that the Assad regime has re-established itself, with the aid of Russia and Iran, the current administration seeks a change in behavior.⁹⁰ The Trump administration is attempting to bring resolution to the Syrian conflict by applying smart power through a three-track strategy. The strategy aims to achieve its goals with the terms outlined in the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254, expelling Iranian-commanded forces from Syria, and the defeat of the Islamic State. For the proposed strategy to be successful, it will require building alliances through the diplomatic process and coordination in the application of smart power.

The United States used hard power to deter the Soviet Union, defeat Germany and Japan, and then used soft power to rebuild Germany and Japan. These past instances demonstrate that America can apply smart power to achieve its foreign policy goals. However, to attain a political settlement with Syria, America must use smart power in a coordinated manner with the diplomatic instrument of national power orchestrating the other instruments of national power.

Diplomatic Instrument (Soft Power)

The United States must think about the consequences of its foreign policy initiatives towards Syria before it acts. If the United States is serious about protecting and promoting its

⁸⁸ “The Historic Deal That Will Prevent Iran from Acquiring a Nuclear Weapon | The White House,” accessed February 13, 2020, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/issues/foreign-policy/iran-deal>.

⁸⁹ The White House, “Remarks by President Trump on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action,” last modified 2018, accessed February 13, 2020, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-joint-comprehensive-plan-action/>.

⁹⁰ Humud, “*Syria Conflict Overview : 2011-2018.*”

national interests, then the country must reassert and solidify itself as the leader in the global community. The best approach for America to regain its leadership role is through diplomacy. Diplomacy is “the art and practice of conducting negotiations and maintaining relations between nations; skill in handling affairs without arousing hostility.”⁹¹ Diplomacy verbally communicates realities into a codified negotiated agreement that may move nations closer together; it represents the realities – clarifies mutual understanding – for the countries involved in space and time. In *Orchestrating the Instrument of National Power*, Robert Worley identifies the diplomatic instrument as the preeminent instrument of national power. When negotiating an agreement, “the diplomat is well-positioned to consider the specific issue on the table in the context of all other issues between the two states, and the diplomat can put options on the table that draw from the resources of the other instruments of national power.”⁹²

Since 2011, when the civil war erupted, the conflict has presented the United States with significant policy challenges. In 2014, US policy ranged from counterterrorism operations against the Islamic State, airstrikes against suspected chemical weapons facilities to humanitarian aid for displaced Syrian civilians, and to the countries impacted by the outflow of refugees. Additionally, the Obama administration advocated for the removal of President Bashar al-Assad.⁹³ These acts and the foreign policy position of the administration constrained US diplomatic efforts and have not been successful in achieving a political settlement.

In 2018, the Trump administration conducted a policy review to assess the Syrian conflict to propose a new way forward to bring resolution to the Syrian Civil War. With this new approach, the United States no longer seeks regime change but a change in behavior of the Assad

⁹¹ Department of State, “Diplomatic Dictionary – The National Museum of American Diplomacy,” last modified 2019, accessed November 11, 2019, <https://diplomacy.state.gov/discover-diplomacy/diplomatic-dictionary>.

⁹² D. Robert Worley, *Orchestrating the Instruments of Power, Orchestrating the Instruments of Power* (Omaha, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 240.

⁹³ Humud, Blanchard, and Nikitin, “*Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response*.”

regime.⁹⁴ The goals of the three-track policy will require a diplomatic approach supported by the other instruments of national power to achieve a political settlement.

When the forces loyal to the Syrian government lost control of Raqqah in March 2013, Syria's vital external allies Iran, and Russia, increased their involvement to bolster the Assad regime. Meanwhile, forces opposed to the Syrian government received support from the United States, Turkey, and some European and Arab Gulf states.⁹⁵ To be effective in reaching a political settlement, the United States will have to form an alliance that includes Syria's core regional partners, Russia, and Iran, as illustrated in Figure 1. The United must also understand what each actor's interests are not just in Syria but also the greater Middle East. More importantly, the United States must grasp the Syrian position, which will aid the United States in executing the Trump administration's three-track strategy. According to Henry A. Kissinger, former secretary of state, "for an alliance to be effective, it must reflect some sense of common purpose, a perception of common danger, and the capacity to pool strengths. In an alliance, the *casus belli* is an attack on the interests of its members. The purpose of the alliance is to create an obligation that is more predictable and precise than an analysis of national interests."⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Humud, "Syria Conflict Overview : 2011-2018."

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Henry A. Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 247.

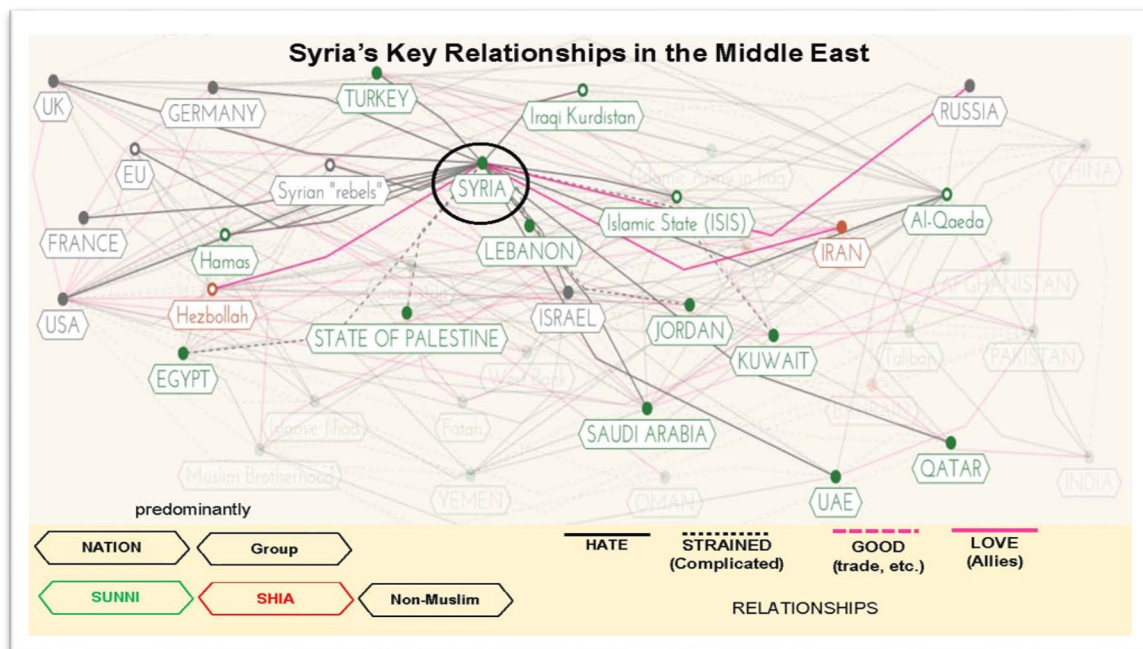


Figure 1. Syria's Key Relationships in the Middle East. "Who Likes Whom in The Middle East? Key Players & Notable Relationships." *Information Is Beautiful*, Information Is Beautiful, accessed February 20, 2020, informationisbeautiful.net/visualizations/the-middle-east-key-players-notable-relationships/.

Analyzing Syrian action at a given period is beneficial in understanding the strong determinants of Syria's foreign policy. First, Syria is imbued with a strong sense of grievance from the history of its formation as a nation.⁹⁷ The forced partition by the Western powers under the French mandate, which led to the creation of Israel. Arab nationalism, the dominant identity of the Assad regime, is a direct outcome of this experience.⁹⁸ More than these lessons, from its long, disappointing experience with the United States, Syria has a pessimistic view of the international order, reinforced with what it categorizes as a double standard. The Syrian government observes the selective application of international law, especially against Arab or Muslim countries, while the state of Israel is exempt. From this perspective, Syria, the war in Iraq, demonstrated how the powerful take what they want and the law into its hands. In other

⁹⁷ "Arab Nationalism."

⁹⁸ Ibid.

words, Syria sees itself as a victim of systematic mistreatment. For example, Syria gave up its chemical weapons while Israel maintains its nuclear weapons.⁹⁹

Militarily, Syria faces a mismatch, squeezed between Israel in the west and the United States with troops deployed in Iraq in the east. Because the Syrian government cannot extract enough resources from its economy coupled with the economic sanctions imposed by the United States makes it challenging to fund a large military and provide for the welfare of its citizens. As a result, Syria pursues assistance from its external allies.¹⁰⁰ The immediate goal, around which all Syrian foreign policy revolves, is the recovery of the Golan Heights, seized in 1967 by Israel. Returning the Golan Heights to Syrian control is a matter of national pride and legitimacy.¹⁰¹ However, the Syrian government is aware that it cannot achieve this goal without a peace agreement with Israel. This settlement complements an acceptable resolution to the Palestinian issue.¹⁰²

Before engaging in diplomacy, the United States must identify and communicate its interests to Syria and the other actors in the Middle East. If the Trump administration wants to demonstrate its leadership in the Middle East, it can start by conferring with the other regional powers to understand their interests and determine if a resolution is possible. Figure 2 depicts US key relationships in the Middle East, a source that can assist in resolving the Syrian Civil War.

⁹⁹ Julien Barnes-Dacey and Daniel Levy, “Syria: The Imperative of De-Escalation Policy,” *European Council on Foreign Relations Publications* (London, England, 2013), last modified 2013, accessed January 12, 2020, https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/syria_the_imperative_of_de-escalation208.

¹⁰⁰ Countering Russian and Korean Interdiction, “Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATS Act) Deadlines, Time Frames, and Start Dates,” *Congressional Research Report for Congress* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2018), last modified 2018, accessed January 12, 2020, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10805>.

¹⁰¹ Matthew R.J. Brodsky, “The Importance of the Golan Heights,” last modified 2019, accessed January 12, 2020, <https://freebeacon.com/issues/the-importance-of-the-golan-heights/>.

¹⁰² Jim Zanotti and Carla E. Humud, “Israel and Syria in the Golan Heights: U.S. Recognition of Israel’s Sovereignty Claim,” *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2019), last modified 2019, accessed February 8, 2020, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN11081>.

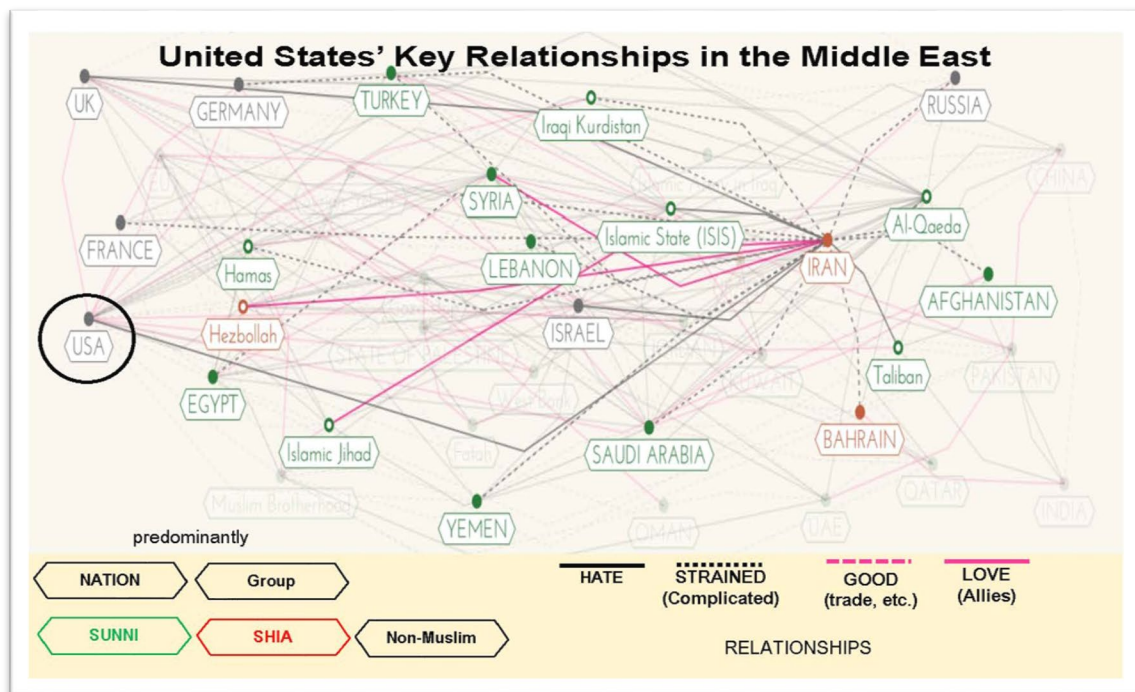


Figure 2. United States' Key Relationships in the Middle East. "Who Likes Whom in The Middle East? Key Players & Notable Relationships." *Information Is Beautiful*, Information Is Beautiful, accessed February 20, 2020, informationisbeautiful.net/visualizations/the-middle-east-key-players-notable-relationships/.

The complexity of the Middle East and in Syria has evaded the world's ability to master it. The increased interest, a growing number of players, and persistent conflict point to a quagmire for any nation that engages in the politics of the region. After nine years of war, the complexity of the conflict in Syria makes a resolution hard to achieve. The failure of America to define its interests in Syria have not made matters better.¹⁰³ However, the Trump administration's newly articulated strategy may not be specific in identifying American interests;¹⁰⁴ it does, however, recognize that an end to the conflict will only come through diplomacy in building an alliance to reach a political settlement.¹⁰⁵ The *National Security Strategy* states, "Diplomacy is indispensable

¹⁰³ Greg Myre, "What Is The U.S. Goal In Syria?," *Parallels*, last modified 2017, accessed February 17, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/04/08/523016523/what-is-the-u-s-goal-in-syria>.

¹⁰⁴ US Department of State, "Secretary Pompeo Remarks at JINSA's 36th Annual Awards Dinner" (YouTube, 2018), accessed February 17, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVXawpxgl6l>.

¹⁰⁵ Humud, Blanchard, and Nikitin, "Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response."

to identifying and implementing solutions to conflicts in unstable regions of the world short of military involvement. It helps to galvanize allies for action and marshal the collective resources of like-minded nations and organizations to address shared problems.”¹⁰⁶

America’s war against the Islamic State was well-intentioned, but the war increased the chances of a direct conflict with Iran and Russia. America and its allies have asked Turkey to restrain from activities in Syria.¹⁰⁷ However, it appears that Turkey does not care what its partners think. An example of Turkey’s defiance is its purchase of the S-400 anti-craft weapon from Russia. A defiant attitude from Turkey does not bode well for any future peace negotiations. After all, the Western powers will rely on Turkey to offset any Russian aggression whose strategic plan reaches beyond the Middle East and into Europe.¹⁰⁸ Before the United States asks the regional players what they want in Syria and the greater Middle East, the Trump administration must pose the same question to itself. A three-track strategy will not accomplish the main objective – obtaining a peace settlement with Syria without a diplomatic approach to orchestrate the instruments of national power will lead back to step one. As the stakes in Syria continues to rise, the world will look to America to lead the way to a political agreement.

Russia has long-standing ties with Syria and the region that dates to the early days of the Cold War. Figure 3 captures Russia’s strategic relationships in the Middle East, along with terrorist organizations that attempt to disrupt the peace process.

¹⁰⁶ The White House, “*National Security Strategy of the United States of America*.”

¹⁰⁷ Barnes-Dacey and Levy, “*Syria: The Imperative of De-Escalation Policy*.”

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

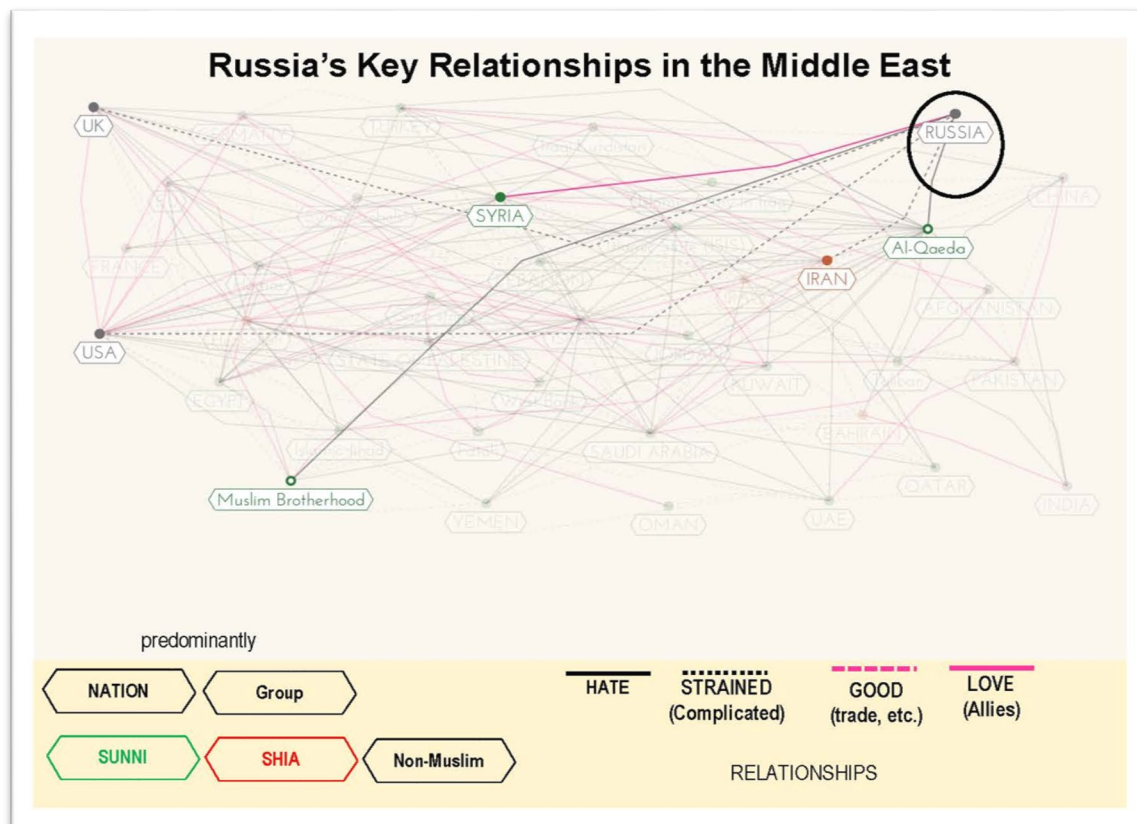


Figure 3. Russia's Key Relationships in the Middle East. "Who Likes Whom in The Middle East? Key Players & Notable Relationships." *Information Is Beautiful*, Information Is Beautiful, accessed February 20, 2020, informationisbeautiful.net/visualizations/the-middle-east-key-players-notable-relationships/.

Russia's primary interest in the conflict is to ensure Syria has the right to self-determination as a sovereign country. Russia is attempting to prevent radical Islamic forces from destabilizing the region further and spilling over into Russia's turbulent Caucasus republics.¹⁰⁹ The lesson that Russia has learned from years of experience is that protracted interventions seldom bring greater security and prosperity to this neighboring region of the Middle East. Lastly, Russia also has an interest in the operation of its Mediterranean port at Tartus and the well-being of the Eastern Orthodox Christian community in Syria. This concern resonates with domestic

¹⁰⁹ Stephanie Pezard et al., "European Relations with Russia: Threat Perceptions, Responses, and Strategies in the Wake of the Ukrainian Crisis," *Research Reports* (Santa Monica, CA, 2017), last modified 2017, accessed February 20, 2020, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1579.html.

public opinion.¹¹⁰ The condition for Russia's support for peace in Syria will, therefore, be to create a process that it does not see as imposing a pro-Western or radical Islamist solution on the country. Pre-emptively removing President Assad, therefore, is non-negotiable for Russia. It is non-negotiable for both symbolic and practical reasons given that Russia will not force President Assad out.¹¹¹ Once a political process is decided, Russia might also be in a more favorable position to exploit its familiarity with the Syrian regime, including security establishment officials with whom it has strong links to move the process forward.¹¹²

The Iran-Syria alliance grew out of a common cause and common enemies. Since the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the two regional players have pooled political leverage and military resources to bolster their positions, build a network of proxy militias and hinder the plans of opponents. Figure 4 highlights this relationship and the militias supported by the two states.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Samuel Charap, Elina Treyger, and Edward Geist, "Understanding Russia's Intervention in Syria," *Research Reports* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2019), last modified 2019, accessed November 24, 2019, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3180.html.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Jubin Goodarzi, "Iran and Syria," *The Iran Primer*, last modified 2015, accessed February 17, 2020, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/iran-and-syria>.

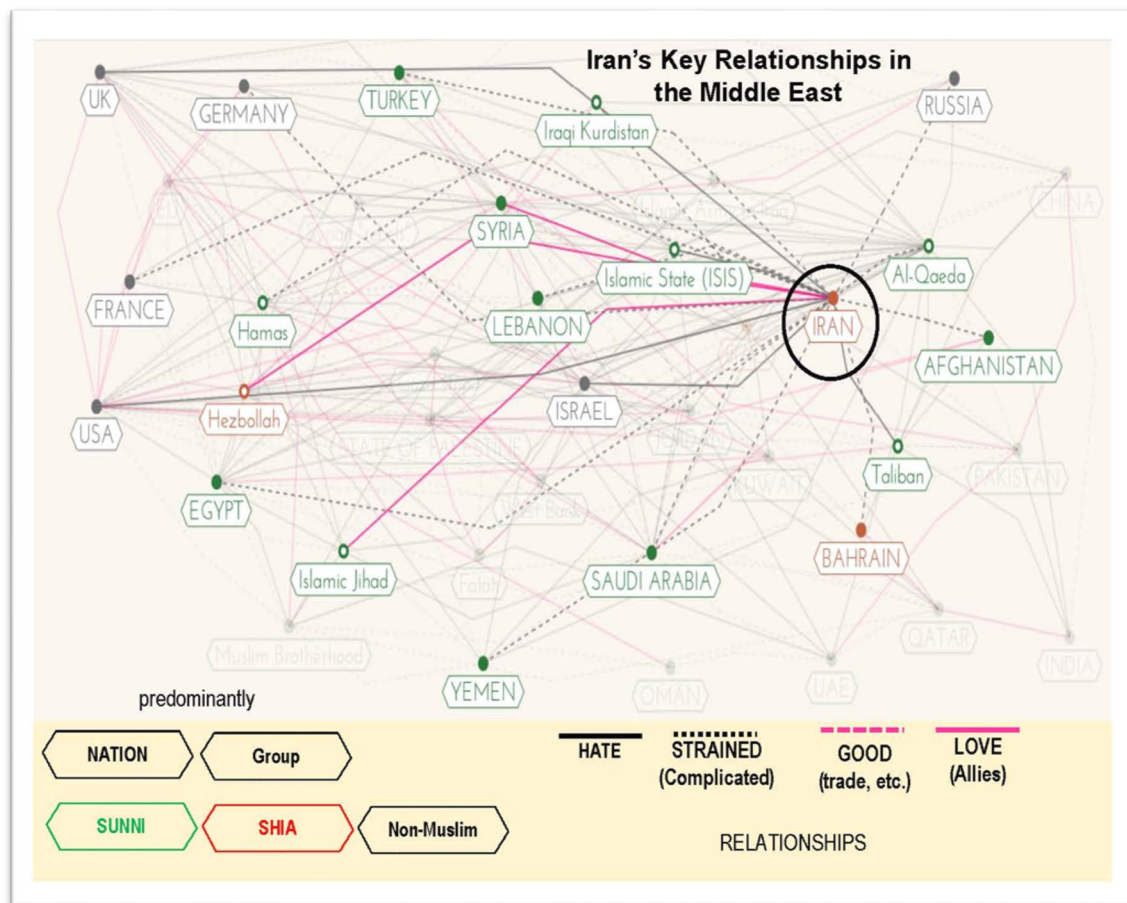


Figure 4. Iran's Key Relationships in the Middle East. "Who Likes Whom in The Middle East? Key Players & Notable Relationships." *Information Is Beautiful*, Information Is Beautiful, accessed February 20, 2020, informationisbeautiful.net/visualizations/the-middle-east-key-players-notable-relationships/.

Iran is the Syrian government's most important material backer. Iran provides military expertise, training, weapons, and even fighters. Also, similar support comes from its close Lebanese ally, Hezbollah. It is doubtful that Iran will not be part of the political solution to the Syrian conflict. Instead, it is likely to maintain a long-term ability to project influence in Syria if not through state structures then via what will become destabilizing nonstate actors. Iran's ongoing influence in Iraq and Lebanon is a clear demonstration of its ability to secure its interests against the will of the West and the Gulf states – a task that it is well-positioned to repeat in Syria, given its deep alliances in the country. However, the United States did display its displeasure in Iran, involving itself in Iraqi affairs by killing Iran's top general. In short, Iran matters, and Iranian officials have signaled initial support for a peace conference to achieve a political solution to the conflict.

The centrality of Iran's support for President al-Assad will, therefore, necessitate engagement with Iran by the United States that goes beyond the nuclear talks. The failure of regional diplomacy over the Syria crisis is, in part, the product of intensifying frictions with Iran over its nuclear program and America's singular focus on the nuclear talks in its dealings with the Iranian government.¹¹⁴ A key perceived aim of the international opposition policy is to dislodge Syria from the Iranian orbit, weakening Iran's regional influence at a time when the West is also seeking substantial nuclear concessions. Removal of the Syrian regime has come to be perceived as a path in an assault on Iran, injecting existential undertones into Tehran's understanding of the crisis and that of its Lebanese ally, Hezbollah.¹¹⁵ Establishing a degree of common ground on Syria may lessen some of the Iranian leadership's more existential concerns regarding Western goals and even enhance the prospect for forwarding movement on the nuclear talks. Iran's interests in Syria include defending its regional clout, as well as its access to Hezbollah in Lebanon, which are challenged by forces opposed to the Assad regime.

Because of Iranian and Russian support to the Assad regime sanctions led by the United States, hard power tactics are losing their effectiveness.¹¹⁶ When formulating a strategy, the United States and the alliance it forms through diplomacy must be realistic about what actions will and will not end the Syrian conflict. The Obama administration had a constructivist approach by taking a position that President al-Assad should step aside. The Trump administration, has, however, brought a realist approach to the conflict and seeks a change in behavior and not regime change. The view held

¹¹⁴ Barnes-Dacey and Levy, "*Syria: The Imperative of De-Escalation Policy*."

¹¹⁵ Phillip Gordon, "Syria: The Need for Diplomacy and De-Escalation - Council on Foreign Relations," *Policy Innovation Memorandum*, last modified 2015, accessed February 15, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/syria/syria-need-diplomacy-de-escalation/p37326>.

¹¹⁶ Rune Friberg Lyme, "Sanctioning Assad's Syria Mapping the Economic, Socioeconomic and Political Repercussions of the International Sanctions Imposed on Syria since March 2011," *DIIS Report 2013:13* (Copenhagen, Denmark: Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt, 2012), last modified 2012, accessed January 7, 2020, https://www.diis.dk/files/media/publications/import/extra/rp2012-13_sanctioning_assads_syria_web_1.pdf.

by the Obama administration hinged on the assumption that Russia will concede on President al-Assad relinquishing power and giving way to the opposition.¹¹⁷

Barring a change on the ground in Syria, diplomacy alone will not bring an end to the Syrian Civil War. However, diplomacy will lead efforts to end hostilities and progress a vision for a political agreement by orchestrating all the instruments of national power. A ceasefire could create space for political bargaining, and in the interim, reduce the human suffering and alleviate the transfer of violence to Syria's neighbors. As the war progresses, the chances of the conflict spilling over into neighboring countries pose a political and security risk for Syria's neighbors. The stakes are high for states like Jordan and Lebanon, who could be at risk for destabilization or terrorist activity, the longer the conflict continues.¹¹⁸ It is a necessity the United States remains engaged and moves to ally with Iran and Russia to secure an end to the conflict and control the strategic message to ensure long-term goals reach outside observers who may not be privy to private negotiations. The United States must be able, through diplomatic activities – inform, advocate, and persuade – aiming to advance America's national interests and policies with the use of smart power in creating an alliance to resolve the situation in Syria. Securing a deal with Syria will require a dialogue – one based on transparency and trust – to move past the confusion to achieve what all interested parties want, access, influence, and stability in the region.

Informational Instrument (Soft Power)

With the proliferation of technology, the informational instrument as a soft power element can shape the action of the diplomatic, military, and economic instruments. Joint Publication 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* reads, “information remains an important instrument of national power, and a strategic resource critical to national security. The concept of information as an instrument of national power extends to non-state actors – such as

¹¹⁷ Humud, “*Syria Conflict Overview : 2011-2018.*”

¹¹⁸ Gordon, “*Syria: The Need for Diplomacy and De-Escalation - Council on Foreign Relations.*”

terrorists and transnational criminal groups – that are using the information to further their causes.”¹¹⁹

When the United States closed its Syrian embassy in 2012, America lost its diplomatic presence and first-hand access to the Syrian government. The absence of diplomatic relations with Syria represents a crippling obstacle to the successful pursuit of US foreign policy objectives in Syria and the Middle East.¹²⁰ In the absence of a diplomatic presence in Syria, information filters through third parties. This indirect type of contact deprives the US government of its ability to control information, through a resident ambassador, who can insert themselves into a crisis, to question, and to listen – all so vital to diplomatic persuasion by a person speaking with the authority of the President of the United States.¹²¹

Additionally, America is in a challenging situation due to the Department of States’ travel advisory, which makes it difficult for American journalists to get into Syria.¹²² The only reliable sources are rebels, interviews conducted over Skype, and social media. These platforms shape and define the dispute in a way that many have never witnessed, where the rebel has various faces or no face at all, and no designated geographical place.¹²³ It is through these platforms that the United States has an opportunity to spread its message to the Syrian people who are seeking an alternative to the current regime. The 2009 report by CACI International Inc., *Dealing With Today’s Asymmetric Threat to U.S. and Global Security*, argues that the United States must be

¹¹⁹ The Joint Staff, Joint Publication 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Government Printing Office: Washington, DC, 2017).

¹²⁰ Humud, “*Syria Conflict Overview : 2011-2018*.”

¹²¹ H. Allen Holmes, “The Importance of Maintaining Diplomatic Relations,” *World Politics Review*, last modified 2009, accessed February 3, 2020, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/insights/4283/the-importance-of-maintaining-diplomatic-relations>.

¹²² US Department of State, “Syria Travel Advisory,” last modified 2019, accessed February 17, 2020, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/syria-travel-advisory.html>.

¹²³ Kelly McEvers, “In Syrian Conflict, Both Sides Vie To Control Message,” *SBP Radio*, last modified 2012, accessed February 17, 2020, <https://listen.sdpb.org/post/syrian-conflict-both-sides-vie-control-message>.

offensive and defensive in the application of smart power. The report explains that offensive soft power deals with shaping preferences and outcomes, while defensive soft power deals with diminishing the hard and soft power capabilities of our adversaries. Understanding these two projections is a requirement for improving their application in a comprehensive smart power strategy.¹²⁴

Consequently, asymmetric actors have an opportunity to establish themselves as a threat to the authority and legitimacy of sovereign governments. With soft power, asymmetric actors undermine the traditional roles of governments and fill gaps to advance their agendas.¹²⁵ In the battle of ideas, it is a necessity that the United States be able to challenge and win in these spaces. The report, *Dealing With Today's Asymmetric Threat to U. S. and Global Security*, proposes two recommendations for America to gain a competitive advantage in applying the informational instrument as an element of soft power. The first method for the United States to gain a competitive advantage is through collaboration. With the use of collaboration, America can foster a dialogue with its allied nations and partner with non-governmental organizations to create an integrated approach to countering the adversary's message.¹²⁶ The second and most important method for the United States to gain a competitive advantage is implementation.¹²⁷ The crucial aspect of the application of the informational instrument is identifying who will lead, organize, and synchronize the elements of smart power. Determining who will lead makes it easier for soft power to work across subsequent administrations.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ "Dealing With Today's Asymmetric Threat to U.S. and Global Security" (Alexandria, VA, 2009), last modified 2009, accessed January 20, 2020, https://www.asymmetrictthreat.net/pdf/symposium1_report.pdf.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Heidi K. Gardner, *Smart Collaboration* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press: Harvard Business Review Press, 2017), 17, 41.

¹²⁷ "Dealing With Today's Asymmetric Threat to U.S. and Global Security."

¹²⁸ David Stupples, "What Is Information Warfare?," *World Economic Forum*, last modified 2015, accessed February 5, 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/12/what-is-information-warfare>.

The United States and its allies must win the information competition to govern. In essence, America is not solely in competition for ideas, but also a contest who can meet the governance needs of people around the world. The competition amongst non-state and state actors has taken on a new dimension, especially when it concerns providing basic needs. If the current government of Syria cannot provide for its citizens, then America and its allies must communicate with the Syrian population as to who can deliver the things expected of government. This effort will have to prioritize dialogue between Syrians and Americans to build trust while quieting negative perceptions about the United States that it only knows hard power through the application of military force and economic sanctions.

Military Instrument (Hard Power)

The military instrument of national power is a vital element of hard power in the application of smart power in achieving the Trump administration's three-track strategy towards Syria. The *National Security Strategy* reads that the "United States military strength remains a vital component of the competition for influence. The Joint Force demonstrates the United States resolve and commitment and provides the ability to fight and win across any plausible conflict that threatens the United States' vital interests."¹²⁹ The military instrument of national power works in coordination with the other instruments of national power to advance and defend American values, interests, and objectives. It also provides the president and diplomats with options and enables them to bargain from a position of strength.¹³⁰ The threat of military force enhances the hard power component of smart power towards Syria. In a region where history matter, past events could amount to a series of failed attempts at a political settlement. As the United States considers its current involvement in Syria, policymakers in Washington must

¹²⁹ The White House, "*National Security Strategy of the United States of America*."

¹³⁰ Ibid.

remain aware of prior American activities in the region. For example, in the early years of the Cold War, the United States attempted to overthrow the Syrian government in a series of coups and countercoups.¹³¹ Due to the collective memory of a citizenry, policymakers must remain mindful of the events that were a disaster or a success; the new strategy will determine if Syria rejects or welcomes US actions. From the onset of the civil war in 2011 through May 2018, the United States and its allies supplied rebel groups in Syria with military aid to depose the Assad regime.¹³² After the Islamic State joined the conflict in Syria, the United States and its allies started conducting operations inside of Syria without the consent of the Syrian government.¹³³ The purpose of these operations was to defeat the Islamic State and seek a negotiated settlement with President al-Assad.¹³⁴ In 2013, after the Syrian government's alleged use of chemical weapons on civilians, President Obama was on the brink of ordering military operations against the Syrian government. However, before the start of military action, a deal was brokered by the Russian government.¹³⁵ The agreement required Syria to give up its chemical weapons and join the Chemical Weapons Convention.¹³⁶

The application of the military instrument of national power in Syria has been ineffective. It has been ineffective because, with the support of the Iranian and Russian governments, President al-Assad is winning the war and is committed to regaining control over Syria.¹³⁷ One

¹³¹ Collelo, *Syria: A Country Study*, 27-34.

¹³² Humud, Blanchard, and Nikitin, “*Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response.*”

¹³³ Myre, “*What Is The U.S. Goal In Syria?*”

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Humud, “*Syria Conflict Overview : 2011-2018.*”

¹³⁶ Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, “*Syria’s Accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention Enters into Force.*”

¹³⁷ Stephen M. Walt, “Bashar Al-Assad Is Now Syria’s Best-Case Scenario,” *Foreign Policy*, last modified 2019, accessed January 12, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/17/assad-syria-turkey-kurds-leadership/>.

year into the uprising in Syria, Mara Karlin from the Center for 21st Century Security and Intelligence, stated before Congress,

The United States knows what it does not want in Syria. But getting to what it does want—the end of the Assad regime—will be messy, difficult, and unsatisfying. The outcome in Syria is not evident today, but I can say with some confidence how it will not end. It will not end with Bashar al-Assad voluntarily stepping aside or choosing exile. It will not end with him making enough reforms to enable a transparent and free Syrian state. Let me be clear: continued oppression and violence in Syria will continue.” With the continued support of Iran and Russia, the Assad regime has maintained control.¹³⁸

The humanitarian costs continue to rise, including the worst refugee crisis in the world originating from a region that is already suffering.¹³⁹

Over the last decade, Russia modernized its military and is using Syria as a testbed while bolstering the Assad regime. Russia’s actions brought more than a presence to the Middle East; they also secured Russia a permanent seat at the negotiating table and vote in how the war will end. More importantly, Russia has increased its access and influence in the region.¹⁴⁰ Iran, despite its struggles with the current American administration, coupled with its economic and political challenges, has shown an unyielding commitment to Syria.¹⁴¹ And, in the process, secured another strategic border with Israel. With the use of its proxy militia, Hezbollah, Iranian access and influence are on the rise, which will make American efforts to offset Iran’s influence difficult.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Mara Karlin, “After 7 Years of War, Assad Has Won in Syria. What’s next for Washington?,” *Brookings*, last modified 2018, accessed February 22, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/02/13/after-7-years-of-war-assad-has-won-in-syria-whats-next-for-washington/>.

¹³⁹ “Syria Crisis: Humanitarian Situation in Syria Now,” *International Committee of the Red Cross*, last modified 2020, accessed February 22, 2020, <https://www.icrc.org/en/where-we-work/middle-east/syria>.

¹⁴⁰ Karlin, “*After 7 Years of War, Assad Has Won in Syria. What’s next for Washington?*”

¹⁴¹ Mohsen Milani, “Why Tehran Won’t Abandon Assad(Ism),” *Washington Quarterly*, last modified 2013, accessed January 20, 2020, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/TWQ_13Winter_Milani.pdf.

¹⁴² Karlin, “*After 7 Years of War, Assad Has Won in Syria. What’s next for Washington?*”

The foreign policy of the United States over the past two decades has relied heavily on the use of the military instrument of national power. However, this hard power element has proven it has its limits when it comes to achieving a political settlement in Syria. By increasingly relying on military options, America has displayed a potential weakness in its foreign policy when it comes to reaching a political solution with the Assad regime. To obtain a peace settlement and ensure its three-track strategy is a success, the United States will have to make concessions and include Russia and Iran in the peace process. The risk of not involving Syria's two main supporters will lead to the western expansion of Russia and consolidation of power in the Shi'a world and two countries with formidable militaries. If the United States removes the military option and moves to seek a solution through diplomacy, the next step in the process is to lift economic sanctions and restore them if negotiations fall apart.

Economic Instrument (Hard Power)

The US implementation of economic sanctions against Syria is a critical element of hard power in the overall application of smart power towards Syria to coerce a political settlement to its civil war. The US enactment of economic sanctions against Syria originates in the political context of the terrorist attacks in New York.¹⁴³ The signing of Executive Order 13338 enacted the initial rounds of sanctions by President Bush on May 11, 2004. The purpose of the Executive Order was to deal with Syria's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, destabilization efforts in Iraq, the military occupation of Lebanon, and aiding terrorist organizations such as Hamas and Hezbollah.¹⁴⁴ The intent of these sanctions remain but have expanded under the Obama and Trump administrations to include freezing assets of Syrian officials to secondary sanctions prohibiting any country from selling petroleum to

¹⁴³ Office of Financial Asset Control (OFAC), "Syria Sanctions Program" (Washington, DC, 2013), last modified 2013, accessed January 20, 2020, <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/syria.pdf>.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

Syria.¹⁴⁵ However, over time these sanctions evolved to ensure the United States does not harm its allies. As a result, these new sanctions have had a nominal impact, particularly when compared to the economic and military aid provided by Iran and Russia; these two nations provide Syria with enough financial and material support to sustain itself.¹⁴⁶ Also, the commercial interests China has in Syria as part of its Silk Road Project will offer resources to reconstruction when the environment in Syria stabilizes.¹⁴⁷ Since the imposition of sanctions on Syria, starting in 2004, the international community, led by the United Nations, has considered resolutions to address the crisis. However, China and Russia have vetoed these efforts.¹⁴⁸ Instead, sanctions were imposed unilaterally by the United States, the European Union, and the League of Arab States.¹⁴⁹

The Assad regime has been the target of a series of executive orders from the United States to compel the Syrian government to move from the battlefield to the negotiation table. In 2006, the Patriot Act prohibited US banks and their overseas locations from corresponding with the Commercial Bank of Syria.¹⁵⁰ In May 2012, Executive Order 13608 increased the scope of the sanctions by barring Americans from some commercial or financial transactions with people

¹⁴⁵ Department of the Treasury, “OFAC Advisory to the Maritime Petroleum Shipping Community” (Washington, DC, 2019), last modified 2019, accessed January 20, 2020, https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/syria_shipping_advisory_03252019.pdf.

¹⁴⁶ Abdelmalek Alaoui, “From Russia to Africa: Why Sanctions Are Ineffective Against Toxic Leadership,” *Forbes*, last modified 2015, accessed February 23, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/abdelmalekalaoui/2015/02/24/from-russia-to-africa-why-sanctions-are-ineffective-against-toxic-leadership/#677727951e5d>.

¹⁴⁷ John Calabrese, “China and Syria: In War and Reconstruction,” *Middle East Institute*, last modified 2019, accessed February 23, 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/china-and-syria-war-and-reconstruction>.

¹⁴⁸ “Russia, China Veto UN Resolution Calling for Ceasefire in Syria,” *Al Jazeera*, last modified 2019, accessed February 28, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/09/russia-china-veto-resolution-calling-truce-idlib-190919163754250.html>.

¹⁴⁹ Friberg Lyme, “Sanctioning Assad’s Syria Mapping the Economic, Socioeconomic and Political Repercussions of the International Sanctions Imposed on Syria since March 2011.”

¹⁵⁰ “Treasury Designates Commercial Bank of Syria as Financial Institution of Primary Money Laundering Concern,” *Press Releases*, last modified 2004, accessed February 28, 2020, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/js1538.aspx>.

attempting to evade sanctions related to Iran and Syria.¹⁵¹ The most recent attempt to compel the Syrian government to move to the bargaining table is a measure that is part of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2020.¹⁵² The actions impose new sanctions on Iran, Russia, and Syria for war crimes committed during Syria's civil war. The penalties will target the Syrian central bank and any entities or countries that "provide financial, material, or technological support to Syria's energy sector, or reconstruction efforts."¹⁵³ Advocates for the sanctions believe the legislation may weaken Russian and Iranian access and influence in the region.¹⁵⁴ The restriction on financial support and trade agreements contribute to the suffering of the Syrian people by blocking the import of fuel to warm homes, food to feed the starving, medicine and medical equipment to treat the ill and injured.¹⁵⁵ In a report filed by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on sanctions, Idriss Jazairy, called the sanctions "pernicious" because they prevented efforts to restore essential services such as clean water, employment, hospitals, and schools.¹⁵⁶ When comparing the sanctions levied by Australia, Canada, European Union, Japan, and others,

¹⁵¹ The White House, "Executive Order -- Prohibiting Certain Transactions with and Suspending Entry into the United States of Foreign Sanctions Evaders with Respect to Iran and Syria," last modified 2012, accessed February 23, 2020, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/01/executive-order-prohibiting-certain-transactions-and-suspending-entry-un>.

¹⁵² "National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019" (Washington, DC, 2019), last modified 2019, accessed February 16, 2020, <https://www.congress.gov/115/crpt/hrpt676/CRPT-115hrpt676.pdf>.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Harvest Prude, "Sanctioning Syria," *WORLD News Group*, last modified 2019, accessed February 23, 2020, https://world.wng.org/2019/12/sanctioning_syria.

¹⁵⁵ Chris Ray, "Sanctioning Syria," *MR Online*, last modified 2020, accessed February 23, 2020, <https://mronline.org/2020/01/10/sanctioning-syria/>.

¹⁵⁶ Idriss Jazairy, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Negative Impact of Unilateral Coercive Measures on the Enjoyment of Human Rights on His Mission to the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/39/54/Add.2) (Advance Edited Version) - Syrian Arab Republic | ReliefWeb* (New York, NY, 2018), accessed February 23, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/report-special-rapporteur-negative-impact-unilateral-coercive-measures>.

the measures imposed by the United States are the most punitive.¹⁵⁷ In the words of Robert Ford, the former United States ambassador to Syria, the United States is waging “economic war” to “strangle to death” Assad’s government.¹⁵⁸ Subsequently, the casualties are not government officials but the ill, children, and the poor.¹⁵⁹

Notwithstanding the outcome of the Syrian Civil War, the United States does have a template for reaching an agreement with a country in the Middle East; that template is the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. To secure a deal with Iran, the United States and its allies used a series of economic sanctions and the threat of military force. Although these elements of hard power brought Iran to the negotiation table, it was diplomacy that secured the deal.¹⁶⁰ The United States, with the assistance of China, France, Germany, Russia, and the United Kingdom, made the deal a reality.¹⁶¹ The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is an example of the informational, military, and economic instruments of national power synchronized by the diplomatic instrument in the application of smart power.

The economic instrument of national power permits the United States to leverage its wealth to obtain influence over other countries. The economic instrument focuses on advancing or limiting another nation’s ability to enjoy economic prosperity.¹⁶² Economic power is

¹⁵⁷ Friberg Lyme, “*Sanctioning Assad’s Syria Mapping the Economic, Socioeconomic and Political Repercussions of the International Sanctions Imposed on Syria since March 2011.*”

¹⁵⁸ Ray, “*Sanctioning Syria.*”

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Arms Control Association, “The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) at a Glance,” accessed February 23, 2020, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/JCPOA-at-a-glance>.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² D. Robert Worley, *Orchestrating the Instruments of Power, Orchestrating the Instruments of Power* (Omaha, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 238.

considered the heart of America's national power.¹⁶³ A nation's economic strength is linked to its ability to pursue a strategy and is essential to the country's grand strategy. The *National Security Strategy* calls for the United States to retain its leadership role as the world's lead economic power.¹⁶⁴ America's position as the leading economic power increases its ability to use economic influence for the good of the nation and its allies. Combining all the instruments of national power, led by the diplomatic instrument, increases US opportunity to reach a political settlement with Syria and its allies.

Conclusion: The US Opportunity to end the Syrian Civil War

The early years of Syrian-American relations are full of hopes dashed and hopes revived. The completion of the First World War and the subsequent breakup of the Ottoman Empire led to the independence of several Arab nations and Western scramble for influence and control over them.¹⁶⁵ It was not until after the First World War that Syria and the United States had a formal diplomatic relationship – before then, the only Americans who had a relationship with the nation were missionaries.¹⁶⁶ It was not until the discovery of vast oil reserves in the region; Syria siding with the Allies against Germany did a Syria-United States relationship emerge. Although relations warmed, the relationship quickly cooled in the aftermath of the Second World War and the early years of the Cold War.¹⁶⁷ Complicating the matter, the United States once benevolent

¹⁶³ The Joint Staff, "Joint Doctrine Note 1-18, *Strategy*" (Government Printing Office: Washington, DC, 2018), last modified 2018, accessed January 6, 2020, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/jdn_jg/jdn1_18.pdf?ver=2018-04-25-150439-540.

¹⁶⁴ The White House, "*National Security Strategy of the United States of America*."

¹⁶⁵ Thomas Collelo, *Syria: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1988), accessed January 6, 2020, https://cdn.loc.gov/master/frd/frdstudy/sy/syriacountrystud00coll_0/syriacountrystud00coll_0.pdf, 14.

¹⁶⁶ Sami M. Moubayed, *Syria and the USA : Washington's Relations with Damascus from Wilson to Eisenhower* (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2012), 24.

¹⁶⁷ Collelo, *Syria: A Country Study*, 19-20.

attitude towards the right to self-determination evolved into one of manipulation and espionage during the Cold War as America considered Syria a proxy of the Soviet Union.¹⁶⁸ Since 2011, the United States has engaged Syria primarily with the economic and military instruments of national power to bring an end to Syria's civil war. The *National Security Strategy* advocates for the use of the soft power element, diplomacy. The document highlights the importance of diplomacy in orchestrating the informational, military, and economic instruments of national power.¹⁶⁹ The synchronization of these instruments by the diplomatic instrument of national power can lead America and its allies to the successful use of smart power towards Syria in achieving the Trump administration's three-track strategy.

The *National Security Strategy* defines the US approach towards the Middle East by encouraging sustainable political and economic stability.¹⁷⁰ The stability of the Middle East is essential because it is at the junction of commercial air and sea travel between Africa, Asia, and Europe. It is also a global energy focal point, a lynchpin of international financial networks, and a crossroads for human migration. The plan for Syria is a political one – an approach that will require the support of Syria's closest allies, Russia, and Iran in the negotiation of a peaceful settlement. The acts committed by the Assad regime, leading to the current conflict, are events that raise serious concerns about Syria's stability in the Middle East and their threat to oil concessions.¹⁷¹ These acts of defiance by the Assad regime demonstrate the importance of building an alliance to compel the Assad regime to move to the bargaining table and bring resolution to the conflict. Given the importance of stability in the region, America must prevent the conflict from extending beyond Syrian borders and destabilizing the region.

¹⁶⁸ Brecher, "*Woodrow Wilson and the Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict.*"

¹⁶⁹ The White House, "*National Security Strategy of the United States of America.*"

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 49.

¹⁷¹ Washington's Blog, "*Middle Eastern Wars Have Always Been About Oil.*"

Diplomacy is an art that can be the deciding factor between alienating and improving an encounter in the negotiation process and beyond. The willingness of the Trump administration to change its position on the Assad regime from regime change to a change in behavior is positive. It increases the chances of achieving a political settlement through three diplomatic steps. The first step the United States can make in achieving a political solution is to re-open the doors of the US Embassy in Syria and open direct communication with the Assad regime. In so doing, the United States will have a chance to control the message and not rely on third parties to negotiate on its behalf. The second step is for the United States to lift all sanctions and offer foreign assistance to aid in reconstruction efforts and, in the process, restore essential services to the Syrian population. The third and final step is for the United States to place differences aside and work with Iran and Russia to bring an end to the civil war. Taking these three steps will allow the United States to improve its image, solidify its leadership role in the Middle East, and decrease Iranian and Russian influence over Syria. Because the current application of hard power towards Syria has not achieved the desired result, the approach changed. In negotiating the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran, the Obama administration acknowledged that “diplomacy may not work, but if it does not, then we have strengthened our ability to form alliances to impose tough sanctions.”¹⁷² The deal with Iran is a framework the United States can use in its application of smart power to support engagement and renew its relation with Syria. The three-track strategy proposed by the Trump administration provides the structure for the building of alliances through diplomacy in the application of smart power to bring the Assad regime to the negotiation table and reach a political settlement to the Syrian civil war.

¹⁷² Rudy DeLeon et al., “Strengthening America’s Options on Iran 10 Key Questions to Inform the Debate” (Washington, DC, 2012), last modified 2012, accessed January 6, 2020, www.americanprogress.org.

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