Counterterrorism in Syria:
Three Potential Scenarios for 2015

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Table of Contents

Counterterrorism in Syria: Three Potential Scenarios for 2015
Capstone Project Spring Semester 2013 - George Bush School of Government and Public Service

2

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We assess that an environment most conducive to U.S. Counterterrorism (CT) efforts is a scenario in which Assad remains in power; a fractured Syria is the scenario that provides the least CT opportunities. The potential CT opportunities are intelligence sharing, training, bilateral cooperation, collection and disruption. It is likely that Assad remaining in power provides medium to high opportunity for all variables, while in a fractured Syria the only high CT opportunity is bilateral cooperation. Figure 1.A indicates the probability of each opportunity and its corresponding scenario.

	Intelligence Sharing	Training	Bilateral Cooperation	Collection	Disruption
Assad in Power	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	High
Post Regime Coalition	High	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
Fractured Syria	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	Low

Figure 1.A. CT Opportunities

We assess that a fractured Syria will likely be the most threatening scenario. A fractured Syria has the greatest number of high threat values. A scenario in which Assad remains in power demonstrates a significantly decreased threat to the indicated threat variables, but it is also the scenario least likely to occur.

	CBW Proliferation	Military Strength	Refugee Populations	Extremists in Power	Safe Havens (Internal)	Safe Havens (External)	Criminal Networks	Factionalism
Assad in Power	3	2	1	3	2	1	2	2
Post Regime Coalition	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	1
Fractured Syria	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1

Figure1.B Terrorism Related Issues

The analysis compares the three scenarios based on eight different threat variables as seen at the top of the figure. The values assigned indicate the threat of each variable in each scenario. The rating system is based on a threat matrix, and values are assigned based on the research and analysis conducted as indicated in Figure 1.C.
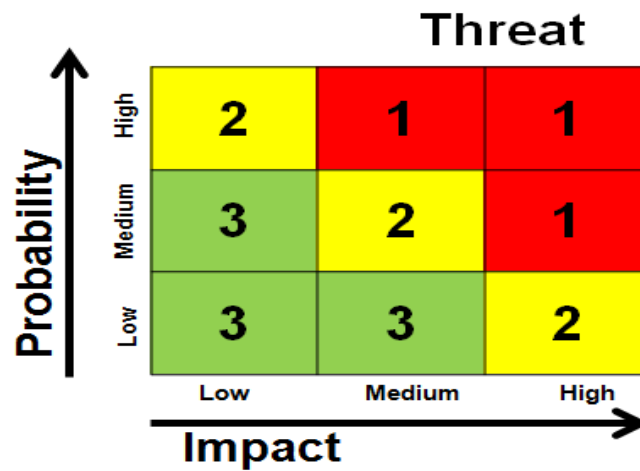
Counterterrorism in Syria: Three Potential Scenarios for 2015
Capstone Project Spring Semester 2013 - George Bush School of Government and Public Service

3

Figure 1.C. Threat Matrix

The threat value of each variable in the scenarios is based on the impact of an event and the probability that it might come to fruition (x and y axis). If a box is red, and is labeled '1', then there is a high probability the event will occur and the impact of the event would be high. Contrarily, if a box is green, and is labeled '3', then there is low probability the event will occur and the impact of the event would be low. If a box is yellow, and is labeled '2', then there is a medium probability the event will occur and the impact of the event would be medium.

We assess the scenario most likely to occur is a fractured Syria. Although a fractured Syria is the most chaotic, addressing the issue of factionalism will likely decrease the threats of the other variables. Factionalism is fueled by populations who pull together and support each other by providing resources. It is likely that factionalism will develop in refugee camps, both internal and external to Syria. Points to note are as follows;

- The threat of factionalism will likely decrease the threat of safe havens from developing and, radical ideology from influencing displaced persons

- Refugee populations seek supplies, goods and services and will accept them from anybody, even if they are Islamists

- U.S CT opportunities will likely increase as the threat of factionalism the decreases

Counterterrorism in Syria: Three Potential Scenarios for 2015
Capstone Project Spring Semester 2013 - George Bush School of Government and Public Service

4

SCOPE NOTES

The Strategic Analysis Branch of the National Counterterrorism Center partnered with students at the George H.W. Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M to produce this 2013 CAPSTONE Project:

- An intelligence estimate report over the future of Syria and CT opportunities

This report assesses terrorism in Syria that might result from the continuous civil conflict. This report focuses on three different scenarios to assess CT opportunities for the U.S. in the region.

- Assad remains in power and solidifies control
- A post-regime coalition government forms with an international ceasefire
- Assad falls and Syria devolves into a fractured state

Each scenario includes starting assumptions, which guided future analysis. In each scenario, the group assessed first, second and third order effects to estimate a picture of what Syria might look like in the year 2015. The report reviews available open source media outlets, academic journals, think tank reports and historical case studies relevant to each scenario.

This report focuses on the following key questions:

- What would persistent conflict in Syria mean for terrorism in the region?
- Given the following three scenarios, what factors might affect their probability and what are the ramifications for long-term U.S. CT efforts?

The nine students split into three teams. Each team focused on one scenario. Each team presented findings to other teams in order to check assumptions and ensure rigor of analysis. Once each scenario analysis was complete, all nine students compared each scenario using frameworks modeled after the National Intelligence Priorities Framework (NIPF) to rank scenarios according to a set of terrorism related issues and counterterrorism opportunities (see Figure1.A and Figure 1.B). Students ranked each issue on a scale of 1-3 with 1 being the highest threat (see Figure 1.B). Additionally, each student ranked Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) on an Intent v. Capabilities matrix (see Figure 2.B in Appendix). These frameworks provided a standard for comparison across each scenario and highlight available CT opportunities in each security environment.

N.B. This report incorporates open media reporting available as of April 12, 2013.

Counterterrorism in Syria: Three Potential Scenarios for 2015
Capstone Project Spring Semester 2013 - George Bush School of Government and Public Service

5

SCENARIO 1: ASSAD REGIME SURVIVES

Assumptions

We assess internal conflict between rebel group leaders will likely slow any gains by the opposition. Foreign donors, such as the United States, Europe, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar will lose patience with the rebels' inability to defeat the government. As a result, aid from international donors will slow or end completely. Syrian government allies, such as Russia and Iran will likely continue to provide military and financial support, allowing it to conquer territory from the opposition. However, due to a dramatic reduction in military capabilities, the Assad regime will likely continue to struggle to maintain full control of Syrian territory or borders.

Assad to Rebuild Military Against Internal Threats

The principal internal threats facing the Assad regime are expected to be the development of internal safe havens and issues related to the military's diminished capabilities.[1] As Assad attempts to regain control, he will likely feel sharp insecurity and attempt to rebuild his military capacity; he will need to consolidate power, secure borders, and maintain control.

- Assad will most likely send elite military units to cities that were strongly contested by rebels and the government during the conflict; a crackdown similar to Saddam Hussein's post-Desert Storm seizure of southern Iraqi cities may begin

- The government will likely concentrate its troop presence in key cities, military bases, research centers, strategic border crossings, and government infrastructure

- Militants and former refugees may use smuggling routes to enter the country for limited attacks on government forces. Their limited military capabilities due to lack of resources may decrease their potential to threaten the government

- Illicit transport networks may allow individual entrepreneurs or opposition groups to provide food, medicine, arms and other services in areas outside of government control.[2] There is a possibility that JN and other opposition groups could find save havens in the periphery of Syria and form bases for future actions against the state. With Assad reasserting power, JN's capabilities will decrease in effectiveness

- As Assad attempts to re-establish his legitimacy, there is a possibility that Assad will evict humanitarian aid agencies, becoming increasingly dependent on external allies. Assad may accept limited support from Sunni Muslim states and opposition-linked countries such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia, but he will try to

Counterterrorism in Syria: Three Potential Scenarios for 2015
Capstone Project Spring Semester 2013 - George Bush School of Government and Public Service

6

limit this action because the opposition states will likely attempt to exert influence through such aid

Assad Will Seek Help to Defend Against External Threats

We assess Assad will work to strengthen his military to defend against external threats. Assad will likely receive aid from his historic allies Iran and Russia. Iraq might also provide assistance to secure their common border. Assad's perception of foreign threats may influence his decision to expand his CBW capabilities, both by the size of his stockpile and upgrading weapons systems. After the conflict, Syria will likely strengthen ties with existing allies, particularly with Iran.[3] Historically, Iran is a major Syrian economic partner and remains deeply committed to preserving the Assad regime.[4]

- Iran is expected to direct Hizballah to help Syria reassert control over its territory.[5] A renewed alliance between Syria, Iran and Hizballah will likely deny JN safe havens within Syria and in border regions

- Iraq's substantial political ties to Iran may cause its leadership to ally with Syria.[6] Iraq's relationship with Syria will likely focus on securing its northwest border while simultaneously putting pressure on militants and their ability to operate in Syria and Iraq. Iraq and Syria may accomplish this with military offensives against militants

- There may be opportunities for Syria to restart a relationship with North Korea as Assad re-builds the Syrian military, but this alliance may not be effective to Assad's long-term goals. This interaction most likely will be limited to arms purchases. The Syrian government could use these weapons to re-equip its armed personnel to secure border areas inhabited by militants

Syrian domestic counterterrorism operations may increase tensions with Israel. Israel might interpret Syrian movements as the transfer of weapons and material to Hizballah or other militants. These actions may prompt Israel to respond with air strikes or military incursions.[7] Israel will likely not hesitate to act on intelligence concerning threats to its safety.

Refugee Camps Outside Syria Present Militant Threats

We assess militants from refugee camps outside of Syria may present a potential threat to Assad's rule. By March 2013, refugees outside Syria exceeded 1,000,000 people, with up to 8,000 leaving Syria daily.[8] The five nations with the largest refugee populations, in descending order, are Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, and Egypt.[9]

- Terrorists or militants will likely seek a safe haven in refugee camps and could recruit and cultivate a following. Refugee camps present opportunities for

Counterterrorism in Syria: Three Potential Scenarios for 2015
Capstone Project Spring Semester 2013 - George Bush School of Government and Public Service

7

extremists to infiltrate and radicalize refugees because of the desperate and poor living conditions, lack of employment, and curtailed freedom of movement

- There is a high probability that elements of the Syrian opposition, including leaders and members of terrorist groups, could seek shelter in refugee camps from Assad's crackdown. Camps may develop into bases of operation for terrorists or extremists. Camp populations could be prone to radicalization and could be recruited for terrorist groups or violent actions

Many of the refugee host nations are at risk from providing a harbor to extremist elements of the Syrian opposition. These countries fall into two categories: countries that will be able to evict terrorist actors and those who will be unable to eradicate extremists. Refugee camps will likely significantly strain the resources of host nations and international organizations.

- Regional countries could face challenges in meeting domestic political or economic demands associated with hosting thousands of refugees. As was the case with Jordan's Black September uprising in 1970. The presence of refugees creates hostile tensions which could create violent clashes between refugees and domestic populations

Syrian Chemical and Biological Weapons Stockpiles

We assess as Assad reasserts control of Syrian territory, he will likely seek to maintain control of his Chemical and Biological Weapon (CBW) stockpiles to avoid intervention by the international community.

- Given the possibility that some CBW may have been lost, stolen or mismanaged, international organizations and actors are expected to request confirmation of the exact status of these arms

- Assad is likely to resist cooperating with the international community and may claim that all weapons are accounted for. This situation will likely set off significant multilateral intelligence collection efforts to locate and recover these weapons

Counterterrorism Opportunities for the United States

Assad remaining in power will likely produce the most opportunity for U.S counterterrorism efforts. The Syrian military or U.S. counterterrorism efforts could assist in disrupting militant and terrorist activities. Furthermore, the increased activity of Syrian allies and anti-Assad militants may also bolster U.S. intelligence collection operations.

Counterterrorism in Syria: Three Potential Scenarios for 2015
Capstone Project Spring Semester 2013 - George Bush School of Government and Public Service

8

Refugee camps create a choke point in the movement of people and materials. The choke points create the potential for robust intelligence collection and an opportunity to monitor the activity of known and potential militants. Countries hosting large refugee populations will likely be open to intelligence or counterterrorism cooperation with the United States. It is also worth noting the following;

- Syria's post-conflict expansion of military and intelligence cooperation with Iran and Hizballah could disrupt JN's attacks.[10] With Iran and Hizballah acting against it, JN might not have control of safe havens within Syria

- North Korean arms may aid Syrian security forces to seize border areas where JN and other militants operate

- Iraq's relationship with Syria may focus on securing its border region against Al-Qaeda in Iraq and JN through cooperative military actions. These operations would pressure and disrupt these groups on both sides of the border

Counterterrorism in Syria: Three Potential Scenarios for 2015
Capstone Project Spring Semester 2013 - George Bush School of Government and Public Service

9

SCENARIO 2: COALITION GOVERNMENT

Assumptions

In this scenario Assad has fallen and a new coalition government is formed under an internationally supervised ceasefire. Two radically different post-Assad outlooks exist: a coalition dominated by moderate factions such as the Free Syrian Army (FSA) could take power or a coalition dominated by extremist/Islamist factions such as Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) could come to the fore.[11] It is outside the scope to determine which of these is more likely. Therefore, this analysis will take both sub-scenarios into account.

Possibility One: Moderate Coalition

If a moderate dominated coalition comes to power, we assess that the regional flow of arms, insurgents and refugees will likely be altered. Former Syrian allies will seek to reestablish pre-war relationships, non-extremists such as the Kurds will seek to foster moderate governance, and Islamists will actively challenge the coalition.

Regional Flows of Arm, Insurgents, and Refugees Altered

- A large part of the Syrian conflict stems from foreign insurgents traveling through Iraq into Syria

- Closing the borders to enhance stability will likely increase the number of foreign insurgents coalescing in refugee camps in both Syria and in neighboring countries[12]

- Secular Syrian moderates will likely realize that coalition forces have reliable physical security and operational intelligence capabilities will increase the potential for a new and beneficial alliance with the US against Islamists[13]

- Iranian arms pipeline(s) to Hizballah will likely be severed. Hizballah has long depended upon Iranian arms shipments moved overland through Syria with Assad's tacit approval.[14] A moderate coalition would be inclined to sever the pipeline for security reasons given Hizballah's support for Assad during the conflict

The differing interests of a moderate coalition from Assad will cause the flow of arms and refugees across Syrian borders to alter.[15] The Gulf States, and to a much lesser extent the U.S., will likely exert influence on how the shifts in these flows unfold. It is unlikely that a moderate coalition will tolerate the Hizballah arms pipeline through Syria, forcing Iran and Hizballah to adjust routes or behavior to keep a flow of weapons. Hizballah will likely be a source of instability in Syria because it will try to maintain existing pipelines or seeking to create an entirely new pipeline.[16]

Counterterrorism in Syria: Three Potential Scenarios for 2015
Capstone Project Spring Semester 2013 - George Bush School of Government and Public Service

10

Former Allies Will Seek to Reestablish Pre-War Relationships

It is likely that Russia, China, and Iran will seek to reestablish the pre-war status quo. Russia's major concern is their port facility in Tartus, their only Mediterranean port.[17] China would also have interests in renewing connections to Syria to access Syria's energy reserves. Iran would have an interest in reestablishing the pre-war status quo to enable the continued existence of their arms pipeline to Hizballah.

Moderates and Kurds Seek Common Ground

The Kurdish population will likely form a coalition amongst themselves, which will help foster a moderate government. Heavy Sunni Kurd involvement increases the likelihood of a moderate constitution and strengthens the Syrian branch of the "Greater Kurdistan" movement.

- Syrian Kurds will likely receive support from Iranian, Iraqi, and Turkish Kurds.[18] This support enhances prospects for regional stability and bilateral ties among state actors

- A grab for power may ensue if other moderate groups are threatened by Kurdish ambitions or are dissatisfied with the institutionalized power-sharing agreement. Moderate Christians, Jews and Muslims may see the PYD's association with the PKK as a potential for a new violent government to replace the old[19]

- A power vacuum creates incentives for individual groups to form paramilitary organizations. This power vacuum may create long term counterterrorism threats and lead to the militarization of the Syrian state

Islamist Groups Challenge the Coalition

As the government is being formed, the coalition will likely be unsuccessful in consolidating power due to lack of stability. The coalition will require a balance of security, governance, and stability to build institutions and infrastructure in Syria. With constant fighting in the countryside, we assess that Islamist groups will begin to breakdown the coalition. If the coalition is unable to contain the Islamists, they can potentially create safe havens within Syria.

JN will likely attack both internal and external supporters of the coalition. By attacking key internal power structures, JN will weaken the coalition and exert their influence.

JN and other Islamist groups will likely fail to come to power politically and will continue fighting for control of the country against the common enemy: the new coalition. This renewed fighting could start by the coalition seeking to gain control of the countryside or by radical groups. Renewed civil war is the probable outcome in any post Assad scenario.[20]

Counterterrorism in Syria: Three Potential Scenarios for 2015
Capstone Project Spring Semester 2013 - George Bush School of Government and Public Service

11

Possibility Two: Extremist Coalition

If an extremist dominated coalition comes to power, we assess that the regional flows of arms, insurgents and refugees will be altered; JN could control a majority of state resources and will likely foster radicalization in urban areas.

Islamist Control of State Resources

In an extremist dominated coalition there will likely be high ranking members of JN in senior level posts that provide safe havens for terrorists in Syria and grant groups like JN access to state resources. JN would most likely seek to dominate the internal and external security apparatuses as well as minister level posts. Major obstacles will prevent CBW from being acquired through conflict; it is likely CBW capabilities will be removed by the international community as part of the cease agreement that stops the war.

- An extremist coalition could use state resources to sponsor terrorist activities through training, financing, and material support. Neighboring states would be concerned about sponsorship and revitalization of domestic terrorist groups by JN

Legitimization of Islamists

Islamist control of state resources and high ranking posts will enable JN and similar groups to gain legitimacy both internationally and domestically in Syria.

- The U.S. would be forced to interact with JN officials if the U.S. sought to negotiate with this Syrian coalition. As part of the legitimate government, JN and other Islamist groups would be difficult to isolate internationally

- Domestically, JN would be viewed as legitimate by its control of the government and by interactions with the international community. Like Hamas in 2006, JN could be legitimized by its political success, which would further enhance its domestic legitimacy gained from providing social services[21]

- International legitimization could also include recognition by major states such as Russia, in return for an agreement on Tartus

Increasing Radicalization in Population Centers

- JN may engage in targeted repression and crackdowns toward Alawites for their repression during the Assad regime. This would force many of the Alawite leaders into hiding

Counterterrorism in Syria: Three Potential Scenarios for 2015
Capstone Project Spring Semester 2013 - George Bush School of Government and Public Service

12

- Sharia law will likely be imposed in the areas of Islamists' influence. A staunchly opposed majority population will likely become a driver of renewed conflict in this case. Syrians do not want to trade Assad's secular dictatorship for an oppressive religious regime.

Dissatisfaction among the moderates, who comprise a large of the population, could lead to a new outbreak of fighting. In the long run, an outbreak of fighting could cause the resurgence of the FSA as a resistance movement against Islamist factions. If conflict breaks out, international supporters of moderates may send funds to counter Islamist influence, but most likely will not intervene militarily.

Reactions to an Extremist Coalition

For reasons both ideological and practical, any government with a strong extremist faction likely will not work with the West and may elect to work with other powers.[22] We assess the extremist coalition will likely receive significant materials and support from Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea.[23]

> **CBW Procurement in a Coalition Scenario**
>
> It is highly unlikely that JN would acquire CBW capabilities in a coalition scenario. There are two possible paths to acquisition of CBW: inheritance as part of the successor regime or acquisition through capture.
>
> JN has proved capable of capturing Syrian military hardware and facilities, including an artillery and air base. Capturing a CBW facility would be much more difficult because Assad has consolidated his arsenal to Alawite dominated regions.[TB.1] Assad will likely use his arsenal to improve his relative position or trade it for protection and Alawite representation in a post-Assad coalition.
>
> Should the arsenal not be used, it is likely an internationally supervised ceasefire will facilitate the surrendering of CBW, and Syria will join international institutions like the Chemical Weapons Convention.
>
> Should JN acquire CBW, it would lack the technical capabilities to use chemical weapons for full effect and may be dissuaded by the potential that a failure or ineffectual use may degrade the psychological value of the weapons. JN could use them as a bargaining chip for recognition or an increase in political influence, such as Libya did in 2003.[TB.2] Use of CBW would incite heavy international backlash on JN.[TB.3]
>
> The likelihood of JN acquiring CBW is miniscule; however, it would represent a potential game changing event in Syria. It would represent only the second terrorist group to possess significant WMD technology. The other was Aum Shinrikyo. This scenario would also cause massive alarm in a moderate coalition. In surrounding states it would create opportunities for strengthening bilateral ties to counter the threat.

- Neighboring states will likely be concerned about Islamist opposition groups, such as the Islamic Action Front in Jordan who have cited JN as an inspiration[24]

- Local actors will likely be incentivized by the threat posed by a powerful, extremist Syria to shape the situation in a manner that aligns with U.S. interests[25]

Counterterrorism in Syria: Three Potential Scenarios for 2015
Capstone Project Spring Semester 2013 - George Bush School of Government and Public Service

13

Counterterrorism Opportunities for the United States

The formation of a coalition government will likely produce good, but not optimal, counterterrorism opportunities for the U.S. The greatest opportunities are found in enhancing bilateral ties with regional actors: Syria under a moderate coalition, Jordan, or Turkey. Jordan maintains a small, but elite, counterterrorism force which allows for the expansion of training and disruption.

The uncertainty about the composition of the coalition government means that there is a large degree of variance in the assessment. A moderate-led Syria will likely see its interests closely aligned with the U.S., allowing for general collection and disruption operations against the Iran-Lebanon arms pipeline. An extremist-led Syria provides opportunity for an increase in bilateral relations with Jordan and Turkey, an increase CT training programs, and an improved intelligence sharing. It is worth noting;

- Successful disruption operations may create additional collection opportunities by forcing terrorists to establish new arms networks

- Jabhat al-Nusra's elevated profile will mean that any group that works with them will become a threat to regional actors and increase CT cooperation

- Disgruntled factions within a moderate or extremist coalition government might be willing to sell out their rivals for perceived political or material gains

Counterterrorism in Syria: Three Potential Scenarios for 2015
Capstone Project Spring Semester 2013 - George Bush School of Government and Public Service

14

SCENARIO 3: FRACTURED SYRIA

Assumptions

A protracted civil war resulted in the demise of Assad's regime and has left the country in political, social, and economic turmoil. Factions clash regularly with other factions for control of splintered sections of the eroded Syrian state. The humanitarian crisis persists, compelling large numbers of Syrian refugees to seek sanctuary in neighboring Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, and even Israel, which strains security resources and diplomatic relationships throughout the region. We also assume that JN will split from the FSA and stand as its own organization.

A Fragmented Syria: the Road to Chaos

After President Assad falls, we assess tribal elements in Syria will initially deploy their contingency plans for this event. The tribal ties in Eastern Syria are very strong and have familial ties to powerful families in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and UAE.

▪ The tribal elders of Egaidat, Al Neim, Al Eniza, and Shammar confederations have already made preparations for a post-Assad Syria; the tribes will likely rely on historical alliances while attempting to forge new ones[26],[27],[28]

▪ When Egaidat tribal leader Nawaf Al-Fares resigned as Syrian envoy to Iraq, old tensions and competition disappeared between their rival tribes[29]

▪ Although there are powerful familial ties in the Gulf States, there is still no central control of the tribal relationships[30]

The tribal system and ruling elites will most likely be challenged for political dominance in the direct aftermath of a Syrian government collapse by Islamic groups such as JN. JN and Islamic efforts to displace or co-opt tribal political systems and leadership will likely succeed in the short run because the Syrian people will seek security during unstable times, and JN is best positioned to provide security and humanitarian benefits. JN and Islamic efforts will likely fail in the long term because they will be challenged as they become outwardly radical and increasingly fundamental.

- As of October 8 2012, Islamic groups have demonstrated their effectiveness in consolidating power in resource rich territories of Eastern Syria and have distributed captured goods to Syrian civilians in areas where they were able to remove government forces[31]

Counterterrorism in Syria: Three Potential Scenarios for 2015
Capstone Project Spring Semester 2013 - George Bush School of Government and Public Service

15

- Much of Syria considers JN and other Islamic groups more capable and committed to the provision of services and resources than the FSA.[32] Up to this point, JN has been observed by local populations to be accountable to the people and uncorrupt. The FSA is seen by many as brutish and untrustworthy[33]

- JN is unlikely to be accepted in the long-run because they would pose a threat to the tribal spheres of influence and regional actors[34]

Tribal Contingency Fails and Population Reverts to Tensions

While the tribes are currently working in tandem to eliminate their common enemy, the Assad regime, research indicates that when Assad falls, the tribes will likely seek to create a unified coalition and attempt to establish some form of central government. However, due to current grievances, self-interests, and historical exploitation by the Assad family, the tribes will most likely not be able to create such a coalition. As such, a lack of central governance will cause a power vacuum to emerge and Syria to fall into a state of fragmentation. This environment will allow JN, which has continued to moderate its behavior and has been providing security and humanitarian services, to gain the local support of some of the population.

- Hawfez al-Assad elevated tribal members lower in the hierarchy because of their close ties to the regime.[35] Bashar al-Assad continued to do this during his reign in an attempt to create loyalty to the regime. As such, within the tribes, there are some people loyal to the regime who would benefit by Assad remaining in power, and there are those who would benefit by his regime collapsing[36]

Hawfez al-Assad institutionalized tribal and sectarian ties to maintain his control. However, the regime's policies towards national unity, through the homogenization of tribal ethnicities have failed and these policies will likely continue to feed the current conflict.[37] Because of historical tensions, a coalition government combined of joint tribal forces will likely be unsuccessful, leaving an opportunity for JN to further consolidate power.

The Rise of Jabhat al-Nusra (JN)

As a result of tribal consolidation, we assess that JN and similar groups will exploit differences among tribes and attempt to prevent any tribal government from forming. JN and other Islamic radicals will attempt to wedge radical Islamic ideology between the tribal leadership and dissenters within the tribe, attempting to create separation in the

Counterterrorism in Syria: Three Potential Scenarios for 2015
Capstone Project Spring Semester 2013 - George Bush School of Government and Public Service

16

hierarchy. This separation that is created will allow Islamist organizations to successfully exploit the inability of the tribal government to provide basic services.

▪ Islamist organizations have been highly successful in gaining influence among the Syrian people[38]

▪ The experienced radical organizations are successful in exploiting tensions within the tribal government because they have moderated their political and ideological rhetoric, while providing security and social services, which gives locals less reason to reject them in the communities[39],[40]

▪ Radical Islamic organizations, like JN, are organized and are steadily building inroads in Syrian society by providing services; this is, in turn, allowing them to consolidate power in terms of local support and access to resources[41]

JN and other Islamic groups will likely seek to exploit the chaos of the ensuing anarchy to solidify their hold over territories and populations. In the long run, as they begin to radicalize their behavior to match their radical Islamic platform, they will most likely be met with resistance from the groups they intend to influence.

▪ JN is providing social services to the Syrian population by looting and redistributing the goods[42]

▪ As the conflict continues, radicals will become more established in communities, develop networks, monopolize the delivery of goods, and bolster their public image as freedom fighters[43]

▪ In the absence of international intervention, the Syrian people are increasingly turning to JN for services and security[44]

After Jabhat al-Nusra Gains Support

Jabhat al-Nusra has become more organized since the beginning of the conflict and will likely be successful in neutralizing the effectiveness of tribal alliances. JN has gained support from the local population because they have appeared to be moderate, from an outside perspective, and have refrained from partaking in behaviors that would be unacceptable to the local community. By continuing to moderate their rhetoric, they have become more appealing to ordinary citizens.[45]

Counterterrorism in Syria: Three Potential Scenarios for 2015
Capstone Project Spring Semester 2013 - George Bush School of Government and Public Service

17

▪ JN is using similar tactics as the Taliban did in the Northwest Frontier Province, Pakistan (FATA/NWFP). According to firsthand accounts, Taliban would provide tribal elders protection in exchange for living in rural villages and allowing them to fight the Pakistani government and American forces

▪ JN uses proven loyal combatants to gain recruits from small villages for station fighters and small scale hit and run attacks[46]

In previous conflicts, extremist elements failed to establish strong ties with local communities, lacked focus on rural environments, relied heavily on outside support, splintered heavily, had poor recruitment standards and had insufficient planning for long term conflict. Often they maintained a high level of secrecy in terms of tactics, strategy, and ideology. Additionally, they avoided utilizing regional states for fear of retaliation. They have a tendency to mobilized diverse groups to their cause and turned to religious figures for training.[47] Research indicates that JN has learned from previous groups and has been successful correcting their mistakes.

▪ Islamists can either refuse to deal with regional actors and isolate themselves from any future negotiations, or they can accept outside aid and participate in an internationally recognized coalition. By accepting aid, Islamist organizations risk splintering their coalitions[48]

▪ JN lacks clarity in an ideological stance because they will likely gain immediate popular approval if they are not seen as fundamentalists. As JN gains support, they will likely slowly reveal their true ideological beliefs and encounter resistance. However, they lack the logistical capability, political legitimacy, and organizational cohesion to counter. They may be in a position to exert influence, but they do not have the capability to control the entirety of Syria[49]

Descent into Chaos

As a result of JN establishing influence in the state, we assess that regional actors will also attempt to establish influence in Syria. This, in turn, will develop into a regional proxy war between states that have a stake in the outcome of Syria: Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, Iran, Russia, and Iraq.

As fundamentalist organizations continue to gain influence among the Syrian people, state actors will likely intervene to ensure their interests in Syria remain secure. States that are adversely being affected by the conflict, such as Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon,

Counterterrorism in Syria: Three Potential Scenarios for 2015
Capstone Project Spring Semester 2013 - George Bush School of Government and Public Service

18

will most likely take a proactive approach to help influence the course of events in Syria. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey will likely be leading efforts against the radical Islamists, while Iran will likely lead efforts to support pro-Assad forces. As fundamentalist and anti-fundamentalist state actors become more involved in the Syrian conflict, the tribal government in Syria will likely be seen as ineffective and useless. As a result, there will be further sectarian violence and greater civil war in Syria.

> **Protracted Proxy Conflicts**
>
> The Syrian Civil War is very similar to the Lebanese Civil War from 1975-1991. The Lebanese Civil War was a bloody and violent war due to the sectarian violence funded by state actors who were participating in the proxy theater. Syria is poised to become a proxy theater for state actors involved. Iran's geopolitical benefit and historical ties to Syria ensures that Iran will be directly involved in the Syrian conflict. If Iran loses what influence it has in Syria, it would be a tremendous blow to the Iranian regime and its influence in the Levant. In addition, if Iran loses Syria, it will impact its ability to supply resources to its proxies Hizballah and Hamas, which will possibly decrease their influence in the region. In response to Iran's involvement, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey will be strongly motivated to become directly involved to balance against Iran's influence in the region.

- There are diverging self-interests among the GCC states regarding the path Syria will take in establishing a peace. Their diverging self-interests, lack of cooperation and diplomacy, and desire to determine the outcome in the state, will likely diminish their ability to project power and shape events in Syria[50]

- While the six GCC states have given hundreds of millions of dollars in financial, material, and military aid, the lack of uniformity of views and shared interests prevent them from holding much influence in the outcome of the Syrian civil war[51]

Syrian refugees in neighboring countries will develop a false sense of security and many will likely begin returning to Syria. As of April 4th, 2013, there are 404,739 refugees in Jordan, 261,635 in Turkey, and 406,311 in Lebanon.[52]

- States are having a difficult time absorbing the abundant number of refugees and providing the necessary services to care for the large influx of people

- Lack of services for refugees provides the perfect condition for Islamist groups and non-state actors to take root

- Disenfranchised people will likely be problematic for Syria and surrounding states as refugees attempt to return home or relocate

Counterterrorism Opportunities for the United States

Civil war in Syria provides limited, but unique opportunities for U.S. counterterrorism efforts. With a fragmented Syria, there will likely be opportunities to weaken Iran's influence in the Levant and the Middle East. In addition, the growth of terrorist organizations in Syria affords the U.S. opportunities to introduce human sources. JN and other fundamentalist organizations will be active in Syria and will require personnel, money, and equipment. Because JN is a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO), it allows the US flexibility in legal and forceful action against the group.[53]

JN's proclaimed allegiance to al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in April 2013, will likely cause JN to lose financial and material support from outside state and non-state actors, who do not wish to be affiliated with a terrorist organization or with al-Qaeda. We assess JN will become increasingly reliant on criminal networks to supplement their diminished resources. This crime-terror nexus affords the U.S. more opportunities to track JN and gather information. [54]

Hamas and Hizballah will likely become more involved in the conflict because of what they potentially stand to lose if their allies in Syria and Iran no longer have influence in the region. There is potential to gain intelligence on their organizations and fill intelligence gaps, possibly neutralizing the influence of Hamas and Hizballah.

Refugees in neighboring countries provide an opportunity for an increased development in CT relationships. Additionally, by providing material and financial support to refugee camps, radical Islamist groups are prevented from exploiting the dismal situation for recruitment advantages.

Counterterrorism in Syria: Three Potential Scenarios for 2015
Capstone Project Spring Semester 2013 - George Bush School of Government and Public Service

20

OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS FOR THE UNITED STATES

Of the terrorism threats previously listed, the greatest opportunity lies in refugees. Facing this issue serves as a "force multiplier" in combating a number of other threats, including: extremists in power, safe havens (internal and external), criminal networks, and the chaos of factionalism.

As of March 2013, an average of 7,000 to 8,000 Syrians left the country each day and sought refuge primarily in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, and Egypt (see Figure 2.A in the appendix for a full listing of refugee and IDP populations by country).[55] As a result of diminishing international and host nation resources, these groups are living in increasingly strained environments, which are expected to contribute to the following issues:

- **Radicalization** is accelerated in refugee crisis situations and occurs as a result of limited employment opportunities, freedom of movement, and other constricting factors[56]

- **Illicit networks** have developed in similar refugee conditions. Yemen is dealing with refugee populations influenced by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) that developed transit routes between AQAP and other extremist groups, such as al-Shabab[57]

- **Safe havens**, historically, have been established inside refugee camps. In Lebanon, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) established its headquarters in refugee camps after it was expelled from Jordan in 1970[58]

- **Recruitment** is likely because refugees are more vulnerable than traditional populations. Refugee environments typically are violent and have few opportunities for personal advancement, making a terrorist organization more attractive[59]

- **Regional instability** has been seen most recently in Jordan, now believed to be host to nearly half a million refugees. Jordan's fifth largest city has become Zaatari, a refugee camp.[60] The Syrian total refugee population in Jordan is expected to exceed one million by 2014, which will place further strain on the country's water, systems and infrastructure resources[61]

Counterterrorism in Syria: Three Potential Scenarios for 2015
Capstone Project Spring Semester 2013 - George Bush School of Government and Public Service

21

APPENDIX

Host Nations	Pre-conflict Refugee and IDP Population	Syrian Refugee Population	IN-COUNTRY TOTAL
LEBANON	10,000	359,000	369,000
JORDAN	29,000	356,000	385,000
TURKEY	50,000	260,000	310,000
IRAQ	1,500,000	116,000	1,616,000
EGYPT	41,000	23,000	64,000
TOTAL	1,630,000	1,114,000	2,744,000
Host Nation: SYRIA	Pre-conflict Refugee Population**	Current IDP Population	Current Refugee Population
SYRIA	1,308,000	3,600,000	639,000
CURRENT TOTALS			4,239,000

Figure 2.A. Syria's Refugee and IDP Population
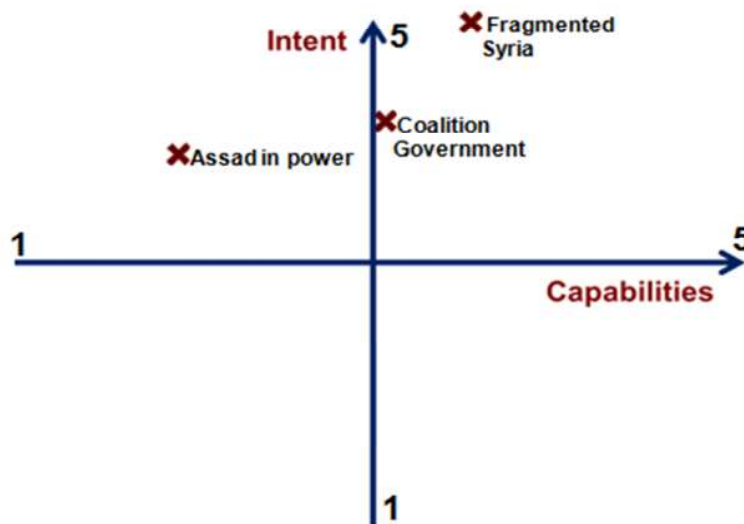

Figure 2.B. Jabhat al-Nusra Threat Vs. Capabilities

Security Index™
Intent Rating

Serial	Consideration	Description	Rating
1	Level 1	Insufficient information is available to EVALUATE and individual's or an organization's INTENT.	
2	Level 2	Information is available which SUGGESTS an EXPRESSION of INTENT to commit acts of violence either independently or in collaboration with other individuals or groups.	
3	Level 3	Processed and analyzed intelligence SUGGESTS an INTENT to commit acts of violence either independently or in collaboration with other individuals or groups.	
4	Level 4	NON-SPECIFIC INTELLIGENCE from RELIABLE and PROVEN sources indicates INTENT to commit acts of violence either independently or in collaboration with other individuals or groups.	
5	Level 5	SPECIIFC INTELLIGENCE from RELIABLE and PROVEN sources (CORROBORATED) indicates INTENT to commit acts of violence either independently or in collaboration with other individuals or groups against a specified target and at a given point in time.	

Figure 2.C. Intent Questions.
These questions were used to calculate the intent of JN. Each Student filled out a separate questionnaire and the averages were used for plotting Figure 2.B.

Security Index™
Capabilities Rating
(1 - Non-Existent / Not Known, 2 - Immature / Non-Effective, 3 - Workable / Effective, 4 - Good, 5 - Excellent

Serial	Consideration	Description	Rating 1 to 5
1	Personnel	An individual or group is assessed to have the will to commit acts of violence either independently or as an entity for the purposes furthering a cause.	
2	Intelligence Collection and Targeting	An individual or entity possess the training and ability to collect and develop intelligence for the purposes of targeting.	
3	Command, Control and Security	An individual or group posses the operational security awareness required to remain undetected throughout all stages of the operational planning phase.	
4	Operational Planning Experience	An individual or group possess the operational planning experience to collect intelligence and targeting information as well as coordinate and mobilize the appropriate attack resources in order to execute and operation whilst remaining undetected.	
5	Tactical Execution Experience	An individual or group possess the appropriate training, tradecraft and fieldcraft skills required to deploy and execute a planned operation whilst remaining undetected.	
6	Logistical Support and Infrastructure	An individual or group possess a level of logistical support and /or infrastructure in order to be able to be sustained during the reconnaissance , planning, operational execution and subsequent extraction / exfiltration phases of an operation.	
7	Weapons and Munitions and Supply Lines	An individual or group is able to SOURCE weapons and munitions be it on a regular or infrequent basis and also has to ability to TRANSPORT and STORE said Weapons and Munitions through secure Supply Lines.	
8	Propaganda and Information Operations	An individual or Group has either an appointed spokesperson or the means to access the media or a similar medium in order to securely promulgate a message or communique.	
9	IT and Communications Capabilities	An individual or group is able to harness the power of IT for the purposes of communication and has the ability to further harden the integrity of their communications security through the use of encryption and or / human couriers.	
10	Financial Resources and Support	An individual or group posses a level of financial sustenance to support both daily living expenses and all operational costs .	

Figure 2.D. Capability Questions. These questions were used to calculate the capability of JN. Each Student filled out a separate questionnaire and the averages were used for plotting Figure 2.B.

Regime Friendly States (Iraq, Iran)	Opposition Friendly States (Israel, Turkey)	States that will be Adversely Affected (Lebanon, Jordan)	Gulf States (Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE)
• Iraq • Shia powers fear a Sunni power takeover will lead to a possible uprising in Sunni insurgency within the state • Western areas of Iraq adjacent to Syria are largely Sunni with tribal ties spreading over the border • Fear that emerging cross-border ties between the Kurds strengthen aspirations for statehood. • Iraqi Shiite militants are fighting alongside Assad's troops- claiming fidelity to Iran's Supreme religious leader. • Refugees who fled at beginning of conflict and are currently residing in Iraq are awaiting to return to a post-Assad society • Iran • Has an enormous stake in the Assad regime remanining in power as it is their only ally in region • In order to maintain sphere of influecne in region, they need regime to survive	• Israel • Divided over whether the devil they know is more preferable to the uncertainties of regime change and possible radical Islamist takeover. • Might see the favored scenario as the survival of the regime which has proven containable • Ideally, regime would emerge weakened to point of having to drop its alliances with Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas • Turkey • Regime change in favor of a Sunni majority would be a blow to Iran, who is Turkey's main competitor for regional influence • However, Turkey is vulnerable to the manipulation of its large Kurdish majority	• Lebanon • Stands to be the most adversely affected state • Division between March 14th Alliance (Sunni) and the March 8th Alliance (Shia) • Status of Hezbollah will be challenged if lifeline to Iran is severed when regime topples • Jordan • Syria controls headwaters of the River Jordan on which most of the kingdom depends for its water supply • Straddles overland route vital to trade • The majority of the Syrian refugees in Jordan are currently hosted by local communities in urban areas. According to the Government of Jordan, more than 300,000 Syrians have entered the country.	• If the Gulf States exert their influence, it will reach from the North of Syria to Western Iraq and Jordan creating a "tribal crescent" in place of Iran's Shia crescent that today extends from Iran to Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon • Qatari and Saudi funding and weaponry was finding its way to competing factions within the Free Syrian Army. • Qatar reportedly developed close links with the Muslim Brotherhood of Syria- other Gulf networks allegedly supported Salafi groups that form part of wider Islamist networks. • Way to restore a regional balance to counter against a strong Iran and a politically transformed Iraq • Dislike of the Assad regime doesn't necessarily align Gulf interests and long-term vision for Syria. • Cooperation on diplomacy and strategy is lacking • Kuwait, UAE, Saudi Arabia, have given $300million+ in aid • Risk entrenching tribal rivalries if they overplay hand

Figure 2.E Nations and their Stake in Syria

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Counterterrorism in Syria: Three Potential Scenarios for 2015
Capstone Project Spring Semester 2013 - George Bush School of Government and Public Service

29