



The Coming Calamity in Syria

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Executive Summary

- In fall 2012, there is a stalemate punctuated by acts of terrorism in Aleppo and Damascus. Syrian and foreign Jihadists continue in their attempts to create a humanitarian crisis, especially in Aleppo, in order to induce the Arab-Muslim intervention. That the Syrian people are paying a huge price for these political maneuvers still matters to none.
- Presently, the dominant dynamics of the crisis in Syria are the inner-relations within the main camps and not just the interaction between the multiple warring sides. Official Damascus and Bashar al-Assad are not one and the same. The urban-economic elite is also divided into several sub-groups that stay together because of a general common interest and for fear of the dire ramifications of the unchecked rise of the opposition. The rest of the Syrian population is almost exclusively Sunni Arab. Significantly, even the Islamist and Jihadist population is vehemently anti-Muslim Brothers.
- There is a widening gap between the “outside” opposition and the key forces and trends inside Syria. Significantly, the Free Syrian Army has always been - and even when reincarnated as the Syrian National Army will continue to be – a hollow shell with no following inside.
- Whatever fighting inside are conducted by predominantly Jihadist forces that are increasingly beholden to foreign volunteers. The primary perpetrators of the fighting in Aleppo are Jihadist forces sponsored from across the Turkish border that are increasingly joined by local criminal gangs who now claim higher motivations. These Jihadist forces are waging their Jihad for the establishment of an Islamist-Jihadist Syria and not for the toppling of the Assad regime and the establishment of a westernized government in its stead.
- Further complicating the Jihadist scene are the Sunni Jihadist forces sponsored by Iran’s Quds Forces. These conduct special operations under the banner of al-Qaida and similar Jihadist forces and break the thrust between the people and their ostensible liberators.
- With such prevailing trends, the indigenous armed opposition to the Assad administration will not last for long. Given the destitute of the vast majority of the Syrian population - the opposition might not even survive a harsh winter.



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ANALYSIS

In fall 2012, the Syria – that is, Bilad al-Sham – crisis is spreading in, and is having long-term implications for, the Greater Middle East. Inside Syria, there is a stalemate punctuated by acts of terrorism in Aleppo and Damascus. Syrian and foreign Jihadists continue in their attempts to create a humanitarian crisis, especially in Aleppo, in order to induce the Arab-Muslim intervention that the Emir of Qatar called for at the UN. Such an intervention, both Doha and Ankara are convinced, would ultimately further their own regional aspirations. That the Syrian people are paying a huge price for these political maneuvers still matters to none.

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The overall situation inside Syria is getting immensely complicated and explosive.

The crisis in Syria is a multi-layered multi-faceted quagmire that keeps getting worse. There are outside powers that exploit and/or capitalize on the Syrian crisis in order to further their own vital interests in the Greater Middle East. There are aspirant wannabe's – from westernized intellectuals to Islamists-Jihadists – who are trying to seduce the West into empowering them the way the West did in Tripoli, Libya. There is official Damascus that is far from being a monolithic pro-Assad camp. There is urban-economic Syria that is far from being monolithic. There is the real opposition inside that is diverse and at time in conflict with itself. And there is the majority of the Syrian population that sits on the fence – that is divided into a myriad of nationalities, tribes, clans, strata, creed, etc., and that would not permit the future Syria to rise without their convoluted input. All of them are united in the belief that the current situation cannot go on indefinitely and that therefore some kind of a resolution to the fratricidal carnage is imminent. Needless to say that all want to make sure that their interests and aspirations are taken into consideration once the crisis comes to an end.

Strategically, the Assad administration won the war already in fall 2011. The traditional key to ruling modern Syria has always been an alliance between the minorities-dominated security and Sunni-dominated urban economic elites – and Damascus has already succeeded to restore this alliance. This success is aptly demonstrated in the sustenance and cohesion of the Syrian security forces that are predominantly Sunni in the continuous intense fighting and the minuscule rates of defection and desertion. In the strategic zones of Syria, the opposition remains contained in several slums and neighborhoods. The bitter fighting in Aleppo is a desperate yet doomed effort by the Jihadists and their Turkish sponsors to challenge this status quo.

Although, the actual fighting in Syria itself have been subsiding since mid-summer – the long-term context of this trend is most dangerous. The number of attacks on both civilians and Syrian military forces has markedly declined in recent months. The fratricidal war has transformed into a desperate struggle for mere survival as the dreading winter is due soon. Well over half the population is now preoccupied with self-survival and effectively indifferent to the national-political situation. The destitute blame both the Assad administration and the Islamist-Jihadist opposition for their plight, and want them out of their lives. Hence, most of Syria is no-man's land where the locals take care of their own survival against adversity. Simply put, the majority of Syrians no longer care about the administration in Damascus or the very existence of Syria as a modern state. All the majority of the people want is for the conflict and fighting to just end so that they can put food on the table, take care of their children, and rebuild their shattered lives – as individuals, core-families, extended-families and tribes, in this order. Soon, the people will give up on the very existence of a modern Syria – and the demise



of statehood will spread across Syria's borders with Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan.

Meanwhile, on the ground, the war in Syria remains at a deadlock as the multi-faceted fratricidal carnage keeps escalating and spreading. The main engine of violence is the flow of Syrian and foreign Jihadists that have increased the pace of politically embarrassing strikes at the centers of Damascus, Aleppo and other cities to the detriment of the civilian population that suffers the brunt of the security forces' reaction. Concurrently, these Jihadists also fight the indigenous tribal insurrection in the vast interior – al-Jazira – in order to transform it by force into an Islamist Jihad.

Consequently, while these urban strikes and the escalating militancy at the heartland are not sufficient to overthrow, or even challenge, the Assad administration – they devastate the people of Syria. The Jihadists also prevent both Damascus and the genuine opposition at the interior – led by the Syrian Liberation Army – from containing the conflict, let alone bringing it to a negotiated end.

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Presently, the dominant dynamics of the crisis in Syria are the inner-relations within the main camps and not just the interaction between the multiple warring sides.

Official Damascus and Bashar al-Assad are not one and the same. There are several foci of power that coalesce in Damascus because they dread the alternative:

1. Bashar al-Assad and his inner-most circle. They are power hungry, defiant and desperate. They will go on fighting to the bitter end unless cajoled into a negotiated deal. The perfidy of the highest-most echelons in Obama's Washington and Sarkozy's Paris – who had promised in late summer 2011 to help the Assad elite emerge from the crisis in return for delivering Muammar Qadhafi to Western hands only to renege and raise the pressure on Damascus a couple of months later – only hardened Assad's resolve to win at all cost and profound mistrust of the US-led West.
2. Allawite nationalists who are ready to abandon Damascus for an Allawite fiefdom in the coastal areas. The leadership of this group ranges between those demanding the secession of the coastal area and those ready to accept some form of autonomy in a unified Syria.
3. Minorities' stalwarts – mainly Allawites, Druze and Kurds – who are committed to the sustenance of the Fertile Crescent of Minorities as the key to the viability of the modern Syrian state. They are ready to compromise with any post-Assad government that will recognize the minorities' rights to self-rule/self-identity/autonomy.
4. Bilad al-Sham nationalists – including the old-generation Baathist supporters of Salah-al-Din al-Bitar – who are committed to traditional Arab nationalism and statehood, and who will compromise with any post-Assad government that will sustain and further a modern Syrian state as a regional power to be reckoned with.
5. Members of the Assad administration who fear for their own personal power, posture and possible retribution. Among these are the key technocrats crucial in any case for the efficient running of the post-Assad state. Hence, it is in the self-interest of the opposition to make deals with them.



The urban-economic elite is also divided into several sub-groups that stay together because of a general common interest – economic well-being – and for fear of the dire ramifications of the unchecked rise of the opposition – particularly the Jihadists and their criminal allies. This population grouping is concentrated mainly along the Damascus-Aleppo corridor. Significantly, their alliance with the Assad administration is based more on the quest for protection against the Jihadists than belief that the Assad administration can further their own interests. The key components are:

1. Traditionalist extended families with tribal and landed-gentry roots. These families represent the bulk of the old money and commercial heritage that define urban-economic Syria. They have vested interest in the restoration of a modern Syrian state friendly with the West.
2. The westernized urbane extended families that rose in the last two-three decades as the result of the urbanization and modernization of Syria. Their prominence and social distinction is the result of their professional education – mostly abroad. Significantly, this group is comprised of Sunni Arabs and minorities – including inter-marriages.
3. Armenian, and to a lesser degree Orthodox Christian, elite that also represents old money and commercial heritage. However, members of this group tend to keep to themselves due to a legacy of discrimination. Communal self-survival is extremely strong among all Christian communities in Syria and supersedes their loyalties to state and social strata.
4. The bazar artisans, small merchants, etc. This is the bedrock of urban Syria. Although predominantly Sunni Arabs with tribal heritage – because of generations of common interests and inter-marriage, their primary/dominant self-identities are built around clan and extended family loyalties within their cities. They are the only urban strata with traditionalist-Islamist tendencies – but they are not Jihadists.

The rest of the Syrian population is almost exclusively Sunni Arab. They all adhere to the traditionalist social structure – namely, the preeminence of nations, tribes and clans. However, in recent decades, they have evolved by location and modernization. In the rural interior – al-Jazira – national and tribal identities are still the strongest and they extend to members of the tribes who joined the security services and other government positions. The closer one gets to the local cities and townships – the stronger and dominant become the sub-identities solidified by common interests and inter-marriage – namely, clan and extended family loyalties. Their divisions might seem simple – but they are not. There are sub- and sub-sub- divisions that create enmities and resentments spanning generations. These divisions make straight forward political organization and mobilization nearly impossible.

A unique sub-component of the rural population is the blue-collar neighborhoods and urban slums along the Damascus-Aleppo corridor. These expanded dramatically during the last three-four decades as a result of both growing industrialization and the near-collapse of Syrian agriculture due to endemic lack of water. The dislocated, uneducated and impoverished youth that made their ways to the western cities were overwhelmed by the absence of the all-encompassing tribal support system they were used to. Hence, in desperation, they gravitated into the Islamist system that offered tribe-like all-encompassing confidence, support and assistance through the neighborhood mosque system. Consequently, this population group is also divided among mosques and Islamist trends. In recent years – due to frustration and indoctrination – some elements have



been radicalized and become Jihadists. They led the initial phase of the revolt against the Assad administration.

Significantly, this Islamist and Jihadist population is vehemently anti-Muslim Brothers. The Ikhwan al-Muslimin are hated at the grassroots because after the confrontations of the late-1970's and early-1980's, and particularly the Hama revolt of 1982, the Ikhwan leaders left Syria for comfortable exile in the West. They abandoned the grassroots population that followed them into confronting the wrath of the Hafiz al-Assad regime. Moreover, unlike the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, Jordan, Algeria, etc. – the Syrian Ikhwan have never engaged in any social and welfare activities among the Syrian downtrodden. Hence, the Syrian Islamist trends are indigenous, while the Jihadists seek guidance and inspiration from the global Jihadist movement (and therefore welcome and support the foreign volunteers).

Therefore, there is a widening gap between the “outside” opposition – with whom Western politicians and media interact – and the key forces and trends affecting the situation inside Syria. While elements of the “outside” opposition will have an important role to play in the future Syria – they will not be the dominant element. The forces of the interior will dominate Syria's future. Moreover, taken together, the above tapestry of the Syrian population aptly demonstrates that the three pillars of the “outside opposition” currently supported by the West have NO grassroots following inside Syria.

1. The westernized liberal professionals and intellectuals who aspire for a democratic-pluralistic modern Syria that is way beyond the grasp of the vast majority of Syrians. Under the immense pressure of the economic hardships of recent years and the recent months of deprivation and war – the bulk of the population throughout Syria has been seeking solace in, and withdrawing into, the self-sustenance and mutual-protection provided by the traditional core-structures – namely, nation, tribe, clan and extended family. To expect the vast majority of Syrians to break these bonds – cemented by blood, sacrifices and hardships – and commit to a westernized socio-political structure is illusory.
2. The Islamist opposition leadership such as the Syrian National Council (SNC) – presently sponsored by the US, Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia – is predominantly comprised of exiled leaders long affiliated with the Muslim Brothers. As discussed above – these leaders are despised inside, even among the Islamists. The lavish foreign aid – both humanitarian and military – cannot change the profound mistrust and enmity built over decades. That some locals accept the Ikhwan-delivered aid out of despair need not be construed as genuine recognition of, or support for, the Ikhwan.
3. The exiled defectors from the Assad regime – also presently sponsored by the US, Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia – are even more hated and despised by the grassroots population. All Syrians – from the very top to the very bottom – have been victims at one point or another of the Syrian state's oppressive dictatorship. Veteran leaders of the Assad regime – no matter how repentant after their recent defections – are still part and parcel of the Assads' forces of evil. They served the regime loyally, did not stand up to the Assads even when it was possible, and defected only when the regime started crumbling.

The state of the military senior officers – from Colonel and above – who defected is even more complicated. Virtually all westernized, urban and nationalist Syrians – both Sunnis and minorities – have regarded the military as epitome of Syrian nationalism, patriotism and statehood. Therefore, they sent their children to pursue military careers. For them, the officer corps stands for Syria – not the regime. Hence, the military



defectors are perceived as having betrayed Syria – and NOT the Assad regime. In extreme circumstances like now – patriotic officers are expected to lead their units in a military coup against the hated regime, and not to take their families to the safety and comfort of exile in Turkey or Qatar.

For the Sunni Arab population in the interior – al-Jazira – the sense of betrayal is even more personal. These people had their sons sent to serve as a key to upward mobility for the entire family. These sons were entrusted to Sunni officers who swore to take care of them. These officers have now betrayed this trust by defecting while leaving their troops behind. This is a major affront to the tribal traditional sensitivities based on honor and trust.

Hence, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) has always been – and even when reincarnated as the Syrian National Army (SNA) will continue to be – a hollow shell with no following inside. Little wonder that the FSA/SNA has transformed into an excellent PR machine claiming responsibility for all real and imaginary violence inside Syria. However, no amount of publicity and prominence in the western and Arab media will be able to reverse the grassroots' profound mistrust and growing hostility.

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By September 2012, fighting by the indigenous opposition has all but subsided. The active forces are exhausted and starving. With fall and winter coming soon – the focus of the grassroots opposition is on securing the habitats of their popular bases and ensuring the availability of most basic food and shelter. This challenge has grown immensely compared to last year because of the flow of internal refugees from the urban slums back to their native regions, as well as the continued collapse of the economy including food production and basic services. Consequently local tribal chiefs and regional commanders focus more on protecting and caring for their own populace than on the fate of the Assad administration in faraway Damascus.

Even if one believes the self-serving accounts of the FSA/SNA – there are less than half-a-dozen noteworthy incidents per day throughout Syria. The Syrian military and security forces acknowledge about two thirds of these incidents. The only fighting forces truly active are the urban criminal gangs and the foreign-sponsored Jihadist groups. The urban gangs exploit the reluctance of the urban elites – mainly in the greater Aleppo area – to join the war as justification for a wave of criminality aimed to “punish” the middle class and affluent neighborhoods. The gangs' activities range from petty street robberies to kidnapping-for-ransom. Vacated apartments and houses are looted and the contents sold on the black markets in Jordan and Lebanon. These criminal activities do have a political impact, though. The urban elites that have refused to support the opposition and thus facilitated the Assad administration's victory in fall 2011 increasingly have troubles holding their grounds. These elites do not join the opposition and increasingly help Syrian Intelligence and Special Forces with information that enable them to conduct increasingly effective preventive raids against opposition commanders, safe-houses and weapons storage sites. However, these urban elites also give up on sustaining order and governance in their cities – thus exacerbating the chaos increasingly prevailing throughout western Syria.

The foreign-sponsored Jihadists (both Syrian and foreign volunteers increasingly controlled by Turkey and funded mainly by Qatar) are focused on the “battles” for Aleppo and Damascus. They exploit the growing reluctance of Damascus to commit the Syrian military to clashes with rebel forces. Most ground forces activities (with Damascus being the noteworthy exception) are aggressive and preventive foot patrols in contested streets and suburbs by various pro-regime militias (the Allawite Shabiha and a myriad of Sunni counterparts) and infantry small units. In cases of opposition attacks, the Syrian military largely prefers to respond with air-



power – mainly helicopter strikes but occasionally also bombings by light strike aircraft. Thus, there is very little fighting inside Syria except for recurring acts of terrorism in the Damascus and Aleppo regions. The primary perpetrators of these fighting are Jihadist forces sponsored from across the border that are increasingly joined by local criminal gangs who now claim higher motivations.

Most important however, is the current rejuvenation of the “decisive” battle for Aleppo as “the last opportunity” of the Islamic revolution. The significance of the escalation in the Aleppo area lies in the efforts by Ankara and Doha to transform the fighting into an artificially induced humanitarian tragedy that, in turn, will warrant the establishment of safe-zones near the Turkish border and the ensuing launch of Arab-Muslim intervention. This kind of indecisive warfare can go on for a very long time. Even if the opposition forces in Aleppo are completely isolated from the outside – there are still a couple of thousand fighters inside a city of over 2.7 million whose population had swollen due to internal dislocation. Under such conditions, these small groupings will be able to elude the heavier and slower security forces for a long time to come.

Presently, the vast majority of the fighters in the greater Aleppo area are Jihadists from outside the area that arrived only for the Jihad (about half are Syrians, about a third are Arabs, and a growing number of Chechen, Sub-Saharan and European volunteers). Starting early September, gangs of “rebels” – comprised to a great extent of drug runners, weapon smugglers, etc. – sponsored and supplied by Turkish intelligence have markedly expanded their operations in the urban areas near the Turkish border. They are abusing the civilian population and forcing their displacement. Simply put, they are creating a huge humanitarian crisis in the vicinity of the Syrian-Turkish border. Meanwhile, the Jihadists are escalating their drive against the Christians and Arameics in northern Syria – forcing them into exile and destroying their Churches.

By now, the foreign Jihadists have become a force to be reckoned with. The first phase in the building of the Jihadist “Foreign Legion” was completed under Qatari sponsorship toward the end of 2011 in Hatay province. The Commander in Chief is Abdel Hakim Belhaj from Libya. His deputies are Al-Mahdi Hatari (the former commander of the Tripoli Brigade) and Kikli Adem (Belhaj’s loyal right-hand man from his LIFG days). The force in Antakya is about 2,500 fighters strong comprised of

- (1) the thousand fighter strong Libyan Brigade that is comprised mainly of LIFG mujahedin and Jihadist fighters trained in and by Qatar for the last war in Libya;
- (2) the thousand fighter strong Iraqi Brigade comprised mainly of Iraqi Ansar al-Sunna fighters (that also keep conducting terrorist operations in Baghdad and the rest of Iraq) and a host of al-Qaida affiliated Jihadist entities in Iraq; and
- (3) support element for training, logistics, intelligence and special operations where the majority of the personnel are Egyptians and Palestinians, as well as a few Gulf Arabs and a few North Africans, with Pakistanis and Afghans providing trainers and logistics/maintenance specialist cadres.

In September 2012, a few hundred strong separate Egyptian unit organized by Egypt’s al-Gamaa al-Islamiya joined the fighting in northern Syria. Concurrently, a Jordanian Salafi unit that includes numerous veterans of the Jihad in Iraq started operating in southern Syria and northern Jordan. Among the commanders arrested by Jordanian intelligence is Abu-Asyad – the nephew of Abu-Musab al-Zarqawi of Iraqi fame.



Whatever fighting inside are conducted by predominantly Jihadist forces that are increasingly beholden to foreign volunteers. These Jihadist forces range from Brigades controlled by Turkish Intelligence to several mixed Syrian-volunteer and pure foreign Jihadist entities. Turkey already runs operations inside Syria using a myriad of opposition units. In the two most active fronts, the Turks directly control the most important units. In the Idleb region in northwestern Syria, the Turks run operations via the North Liberators Brigade. In the al-Bab area northeast of Aleppo that controls the sole traffic venue into the greater Aleppo area, the Turks run operations via the Tawhid Brigade – the region’s most violent Jihadist entity. Other Syrian opposition units include significant foreign Jihadist elements channeled via Turkey. Among these are the Abdallah Azzam Brigades, the al-Nusrah Front, al-Faruq Brigades, Bedouins of the Daraa region, the Military Council in Deir al-Zour, the al-Qaida Tawheed Brigades, the Open Battalion in the Aleppo region, the Dawn of Islam Battalion or Liwa al-Islam, Ahrar al-Sham in Aleppo and Damascus that include Turkish elements, and Liwa al-Tawhid. Many of these elements are considered “official parts” of the FSA/SNA. Other opposition fighting units in the urban centers of Syria include growing numbers of “foreign fighters” – Turks, Afghans, Chechens, Libyans, Europeans and Arabs.

In the longer term, the greatest threat is that these Jihadists forces are waging their Jihad for the establishment of an Islamist-Jihadist Syria and not for the toppling of the Assad regime and the establishment of a westernized government in its stead. Jacques Beres, the co-founder of “Medecins Sans Frontieres”, just served a stint in the underground hospital in Aleppo and returned alarmed by the recent evolution of the revolt. At least half of the rebel fighters he treated were not Syrian – including French and British Islamists. “It’s really something strange to see. They are directly saying that they aren’t interested in Bashar al-Assad’s fall, but are thinking about how to take power afterwards and set up an Islamic state with Sharia law to become part of the world Emirate,” he briefed. Beres emphasized that back in March and May he had made two trips into northwestern Syria. At that time, he “had dismissed suggestions the rebels were dominated by Islamist fighters,” but in the wake of his recent trip to Aleppo he has “been forced to reassess the situation.”

Further complicating the Jihadist scene are the Sunni Jihadist forces sponsored by Iran’s Quds Forces under Maj.Gen. Qassem Soleimani (the Commander of the Quds Forces who answers directly to Khamenei – that is, outside the command structure of the IRGC). These forces have the blessings of eminent Syrian Jihadist leaders affiliated with al-Qaida – most notably, Abu-Musab al-Suri (real name Mustafa Setmariam Nasr, who is presently the most important ideologist of the global Jihadist movement). Abu-Musab al-Suri was handed to Assad’s Mukhabarat by the CIA as a special rendition in spring 2006, and was released at the request of Tehran in December 2011. Several senior commanders were released with him and went to work for the Quds Forces.

These units conduct special operations under the banner of al-Qaida and similar Jihadist forces and break the thrust between the people and their ostensible liberators. Hence, the objective in getting Abu-Musab al-Suri released was to have him intercede with, ultimately even take over, the main Jihadist forces and particularly various vanguard movements. They increasingly cooperate with the Quds Forces toward resolving the Syrian conflagration. From the very beginning, Iranian Intelligence and the Quds Forces have maintained contacts with numerous opposition leaders and commanders, and sustained large-scale intelligence networks in their midst. However, Soleimani needs the Jihadist prominence and theological credentials of Abu-Musab al-Suri in order to provide the Syrian Jihadists with justifications for meaningful cooperation against Turkish- and Qatari-sponsored Jihadist forces and toward reaching post-war compromise and order.



According to Syrian opposition sources, some of the most prominent Jihadist forces, or at least major components thereof, cooperate with Abu-Musab al-Suri and senior commanders. Numerous reports identify the al-Faruq Forces or Brigades under the command of Abdul Razzek Tlass as a major beneficiary of these relations. In recent months, the al-Faruq Brigades acquired huge financial resources, rapidly expanded to controlling and equipping around 7,000 fighters. In the process, they engaged in armed clashes with other internal opposition forces and assassinated numerous leading commanders inside Syria. The al-Nusrah Front or Jabhat al-Nusrah is considered the Syrian branch of al-Qaida. Several of its Syrian and foreign commanders arrived from Afghanistan-Pakistan and Iraq via Iran – bringing with them large sums of money and weapons. The al-Nusrah Front is active in Aleppo and Idlib, and was also responsible for organizing spectacular car-bomb attacks in Damascus. Several local opposition networks and their supporters were surrendered to the Syrian security forces in the context of these operations - causing irreparable damage to the indigenous internal operations.

With such prevailing trends, the indigenous armed opposition to the Assad administration will not last for long. Given the destitute of the vast majority of the Syrian population – the opposition might not even survive a harsh winter.

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Time is therefore of essence. It has dawned on virtually all legitimate leaders that Syria is entering a vicious quagmire where the escalating fratricidal violence is inevitable even though it has little or no impact on the outcome of the war. There is desperation across the board to try and avert this escalation. Moreover, the population in the interior is slowly succumbing to economic destitute which results in nascent radicalization and inclination make Faustian deals with the Jihadists in order to eat and survive. The leadership of the interior is desperate to nip this process in the bud.

Meanwhile, having failed to gain any traction inside – the Islamist-dominated outside opposition is making headway in its drive to seduce the US, Turkey, Egypt, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and France into launching a Libya-style intervention as the sole way of bringing down Assad and empowering them in Damascus. The problem is that neither the Syrian population nor key regional powers will accept such a development – and will thus set the entire region aflame.

A future Syria might still arise from the current fratricidal carnage – but a lot of blood will flow before this happens. Hopefully, this future Syria will arise in the aftermath of negotiations rather than a prolonged fratricidal war. However, the future Syria will be the state that the majority of winning Syrians will want it to be. The most the West can do is ameliorate the Syrians' own transformation process through expertise and advice. Then, the West can, and should, help this new Syria become stable, successful and pro-Western.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.