

Strategy Research Project

From Taif to Geneva: Insights from Lebanon for Syria

by

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United States Army War College
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Abstract

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This paper uses the Lebanese civil war and conflict resolution theories to look at the possibility of achieving a negotiated settlement in Syria. Lebanon contained many similar features to the current Syrian conflict and provides a useful perspective of the possible trajectory of the Syrian conflict, the challenges associated with resolving an ethno-sectarian civil war, and the long-term implications for the region. The Syrian civil war will continue for years under current conditions, and its effects will reverberate in the region for decades. The international community plays an essential role in resolving the conflict and mitigating its effects in the region. Policy recommendations include strengthening opposition unity and capability, developing a regional framework that includes all states with interests in the conflict, and focusing additional effort on the violent extremist networks emerging in Syria.

From Taif to Geneva: Insights from Lebanon for Syria

The United States supports the Syrian people's struggles for a democratic, inclusive, and unified Syria.

—Honorable Anne Patterson¹

The Syrian civil war recently entered its fourth year of fighting, and the conflict threatens both the long-term viability of the Syrian state and regional stability. What started as a peaceful demonstration for economic and government reform in a small town on the outskirts of Damascus, evolved into a vicious civil war that has claimed more than 150,000 casualties and forced more than nine million Syrians from their homes.² Syrian state institutions are failing³, and other governments in the region are straining to support Syrian refugee populations.⁴ United Nations leaders warn of a failed state similar to Somalia.⁵ Terrorists and foreign fighters ranging from Al-Qaeda affiliated movements such as Jabhat Al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) to Lebanese Hezbollah and Iranian Republican Guards forces are actively fighting in the country.⁶ The battle lines continue to shift, but neither side appears capable of decisively winning the war.

The civil war will continue for years under current conditions, and its effects will reverberate in the region for decades. Recent international efforts, such as the Geneva II conference in 2014, failed to resolve the conflict, and many experts believe there is little the international community can do except attempt to contain the effects of the crisis in the region.⁷ Competing interests of regional actors, the lack of cohesion among opposition groups, the willingness of the Assad regime to continue the fight, and the unwillingness of the international community to force a settlement contribute to the current environment.

Every civil war is unique, but the civil war in Lebanon contained many similar features to the current Syrian conflict: ethnic and sectarian tensions fueled by an under-represented majority, fractured opposition groups, terrorist and extremist organizations, and significant influence from outside actors with competing interests. It provides a useful perspective of the possible trajectory of the Syrian conflict, the challenges associated with resolving an ethno-sectarian civil war, and the long-term implications for the region.

The Lebanese conflict lasted more than a decade and its effects are still being felt today—more than twenty years later. It experienced multiple failed cease fire agreements, but ended with a negotiated agreement. It involved four interventions from outside powers, but required Syrian forces to guarantee the terms of the final agreement. It witnessed the proliferation of extremist groups and militias, but now has some of those same groups within the government. Finally, a negotiated settlement ended the war, but it also left the state in a weakened position that is constantly under pressure and requires international assistance.

This paper uses the Lebanese civil war to highlight issues that might impact the Syrian conflict and shape U.S. policy choices in pursuing a negotiated settlement. It does not specifically address the case of one side winning outright on the battlefield. After a brief discussion of current civil war conflict termination theory, the paper reviews several negotiations in the Lebanese civil war including the final one in 1989 that ended the war. These negotiations point to the challenges of resolving a civil war and highlight specific challenges for the Syrian conflict such as addressing the underlying causes of the conflict and requirements to implement an agreement. Next, the paper discusses

the role of regional and global actors in the context of a civil war. Syria, Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United States and Russia all played a role in Lebanon and many of these states also play a role in the current conflict. These states have competing interests in the region, but also have mutual interests that require cooperation. Finally, the paper addresses the post-conflict environment. Lebanon shows the range of possible requirements and challenges that the United States should expect in Syria. The paper concludes with a set of recommendations for the U.S. policy makers.

Comparing the Lebanese civil war with the current Syrian conflict provides useful insights, and warnings, for U.S. policy makers. First, the Lebanese civil war took 15 years to resolve, and conditions are less favorable for a negotiated settlement in Syria. Second, Russia and regional actors such as Saudi Arabia and Iran play a crucial role in resolving the conflict and limiting its effects in the region. Failure to work together on areas of common interest can lead to a larger regional conflict and greater destabilization. Third, extremist organizations that emerge and evolve throughout the conflict will remain and be a permanent part of the regional landscape. Finally, Syria will require continued international and regional engagement for many years following the conflict to help the country rebuild into a functional state.

Negotiated Settlements

U.S. policy and strategy must account for the very real possibility that the Syrian civil war might not end with a negotiated settlement. Negotiated settlements are rare. Most civil wars end with one side winning decisively on the battlefield and dictating the outcome. Since 1940, less than 20 percent of civil wars ended with a negotiated settlement, and almost half of those failed to implement the terms of the agreement.⁸ Successful conflict resolution requires the opposing sides negotiate, agree to a

settlement, and implement the terms of the agreement in an environment of mistrust, insecurity, and risk. A considerable body of work exists concerning the factors or conditions to reach a negotiated settlement in civil wars, but all admit that negotiated settlements are rare.

Civil War Resolution Theories

Three works in particular provide useful insights into the theory of negotiated settlements. Like all theory, these frameworks are not meant to predict outcomes or provide a formula, but they provide a method to explore a complex phenomenon. One idea resonates through them all. No single factor can explain why some civil wars end with a negotiated settlement. This paper uses some key ideas from each one of the theories to illustrate the current challenge in Syria.

Dr. Roy Licklider uses a comprehensive framework that ranges from underlying causes of the conflict to the likelihood of renewed violence following a settlement.⁹

These factors include:

1. The underlying causes of the conflict. The scope and intensity of the conflict will change based on the underlying causes of the conflict and how much change it requires. A conflict driven by identity issues or one that seeks to change the entire government structure or society will be more difficult than one that seeks to merely make a change to the existing structure.
2. The internal politics of the involved groups. A democratic government will act differently throughout the conflict and at the negotiating table than a dictator. Conversely, an opposition that is a broad coalition has different considerations for terms of a settlement than a single opposition group.

3. The military balance on the battlefield. Current battlefield conditions impact the willingness of both sides to negotiate as well as their bargaining power during negotiations.
4. The role of third parties. External actors encourage or inhibit additional violence through their level of support to the sides and their willingness to mediate a settlement. External actors are not uniform, and each has its own level of interest and influence on the outcome.
5. The nature of the government that emerges from the conflict. A settlement that includes both sides of the conflict is more likely to endure, but the process of integrating former warring parties adds risk and uncertainty to the post-conflict environment.

These ideas illustrate the complexity of civil wars and help explain the challenges of resolving the current Syrian crisis.

In another approach, I. William Zartman explores the structural relationship between the two sides and the idea of a conflict that is “ripe for resolution.”¹⁰ Internal conflicts typically feature an asymmetrical relationship between the incumbent government and the opposition. The government has the state’s resources at its disposal, and this imbalance inhibits negotiations. A small window of opportunity emerges when the conflict reaches a “mutually hurting stalemate” or both sides believe that they cannot reach their goals through continued violence at an acceptable cost. Combatants agree to negotiate once they believe nothing can be gained by continuing to fight. This concept provides a possible explanation for the Assad regime’s reluctance to negotiate in Geneva.

The “Credible Commitment Theory” developed by Dr. Barbara Walter provides another view that looks at the implementation of the agreement and the role of third parties.¹¹ This theory holds that the underlying causes and conditions on the ground are important, but the greatest challenge to resolving civil wars through a negotiated settlement is getting both sides to believe that the other side will respect the terms of the agreement.

Two mechanisms help reassure the sides and provide freedom to disarm: a power-sharing arrangement and a third party security guarantee during the demobilization and transition period. The actual structure of the power sharing arrangement should be tailored to the unique issues of the conflict, but it must be guaranteed in the post-war government to reassure everyone that their interests are protected. The second involves security during the demobilization and transition phase. Third party guarantees serve an essential role in reassuring both sides that the other party cannot renege on the agreement, rearm its military forces, and resume the conflict. External actors such as the United Nations or other members of the international community play can influence the durability of any agreement by providing these security guarantees.

Each perspective offers insights into the current conflict in Syria. Some experts believe that any peaceful agreement is unlikely because of the mutually exclusive nature of the underlying causes of conflict. Some opposition groups want greater political representation and economic opportunity and will be satisfied with a political settlement and economic reforms. Others want to overthrow the secular, and Alawite, regime and have no desire to negotiate a settlement. Assad does not want to relinquish

his hold on power, and intends to remain in power. The civil war stops only if the opposing sides reconcile these underlying drivers of instability. Others believe getting both sides to negotiate is the biggest hurdle to settlement. This group believes that the groups fighting in Syria will pursue a negotiated settlement once neither side has a chance of winning militarily or when a side runs out of financial support or the population experiences casualty fatigue. The final group looks at the implementation of any settlement and wonders who will ensure the sides follow the agreement.

Consolidating these three views provides an effective framework to look at both the Lebanese civil war and the Syrian civil war. Resolving a civil war through negotiated settlement requires getting the parties to the negotiating table, getting an agreement, and implementing the agreement. Factors such as the military balance on the battlefield drive the sides to negotiate while the agreement itself must focus on the underlying issues of the conflict. Outside actors play a role in each of these phases by pressuring both sides to negotiate, mediating the negotiations, and assisting with implementation.

The Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990)

The Lebanese civil war illustrates these challenges. The international community and Lebanese leaders repeatedly attempted to stop the fighting and resolve the conflict, but changing actors, conditions, and interests complicated the negotiating process. They tried truces between opposing sides, unilaterally declared ceasefires, peace agreements by outside entities such as the Arab League, and interventions by outside military forces including Syria, Israel, the United States and the United Nations before finally reaching an agreement in 1989. Implementing the agreement required an additional two years including military operations by the Syrian army to enforce the final

terms. Some of the more controversial aspects of the agreement are still not fully implemented today.

The sides appeared very close to resolving the conflict on several occasions before 1989. The National Dialogue Committee formed in September, 1975, only months after the beginning of the war, and appeared to have all the conditions in place for a successful end to the war. The committee represented all elements involved in the conflict, and focused on two key issues: the political makeup of the government and the armed Palestinian presence in the country.¹²

The country's confessional form of government balanced Christian and Muslim interests within the country by formalizing political power along sectarian lines, but this structure also led to a system that did not have the flexibility to adjust to changing demographics and conditions.¹³ Muslims became the majority population within the country, but did not see a proportionate increase in their political or economic power. As a result, Muslim groups wanted to limit the authority of the president which represented Christian interests, increase the authority of the prime minister's position which represented Muslim interests, increase the overall size of the parliament, and have direct elections for parliament members.¹⁴

The Christian side viewed the Palestinian presence as a threat to the nation's sovereignty, and wanted to limit their power and activities in the country while Muslim representatives wanted to focus on political reform. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) moved to Lebanon when Jordan and Syrian expelled them due to their militancy.¹⁵ Lebanon did not have a strong enough government or military to prevent the PLO from moving into the southern refugee camps, and the PLO eventually

reached an agreement with the Lebanese government allowing them to administer the camps and maintain internal security forces.¹⁶ The PLO used these staging areas to attack Israel often leading to retaliation against the Lebanese government and military causing tensions between the PLO and Lebanese government.¹⁷ PLO actions and alignment with the Shia population added to the already unstable balance leading the Maronite Christian leadership within the country to view the PLO as a serious threat to Lebanese sovereignty.¹⁸ Muslim representatives considered the Palestinian issue irrelevant, and wanted to focus on political reform that increased their power in the system.¹⁹

The National Dialogue Committee crafted an agreement that addressed concerns from both sides, and it appeared that the civil war would end less than a year after it started, but failed implementation led to continued conflict. The Constitutional Document that emerged weakened the position of the Maronite Christian president, increased the power of the Sunni Muslim prime minister, and reallocated power within the Parliament to be more equitable. The document also called on the Palestinians to abide by previous agreements.²⁰ Unfortunately, the civil war was too much for the Lebanese army, and it fractured in April, 1976, without ever implementing the terms of the agreement.²¹ The Syrians feared that a Muslim dominated government would invite Israeli intervention, so Syrian forces intervened in the country in support of the Christian Lebanese government to stabilize the situation. The U.S. national leadership communicated directly with the Syria leadership to ensure everyone understood Syrian intentions and Israeli constraints.²² The Syrians did not implement the terms of the

original agreement, and their presence fundamentally changed the dynamics of the conflict.

The international community, with Saudi Arabia as a mediator, attempted to negotiate a settlement for a second time at Geneva in 1983. Armed militias now dominated the fighting, and the re-formed Lebanese army had fought them to a stalemate driving both sides to seek a negotiated settlement. This round of negotiation was far different than the first one in 1975 with changes in participants, changes in circumstances, and changes in final objectives. First and foremost, Syria was a key actor in the country and still had thousands of soldiers deployed throughout the country. Second, Israel had invaded the country in 1982, and destroyed the Palestinian military infrastructure in the south which reduced the influence of Palestinians in the conflict.²³ Negotiations focused on the Lebanese-Israeli security agreement signed earlier that year in response to the Israeli intervention. Negotiations ended with a recommendation to the president to end the Lebanese-Israel security agreement without any political reforms to address other underlying problems.²⁴

The leaders reconvened four months later, in the spring of 1984, after another outbreak of fighting led to the withdrawal of a multi-national force composed of American, French, and British forces, and the disintegration of the Lebanese army for a second time.²⁵ The president agreed to a ceasefire, and revoked the Lebanese-Israeli security agreement ensuring Syria's primary role in the country. This agreement established a unity government, but attempts to address the balance of power issues between the various groups failed when Christian militias and the president resisted reforms until security conditions improved.

A sharp increase in violence in 1989 and concerns about possible partition within Lebanon led to Christian and Muslim parliamentarians meeting in Taif, Saudi Arabia, to resolve the crisis. The "Taif Agreement" signed in October, 1989 brought a formal end to the Lebanese civil war.²⁶ Saudi Arabia and the Arab League served as the mediators with United States and Syrian agreement. Syria excluded key militia leaders, and included parliament members from the last officially elected parliament in 1972 to provide some semblance of legitimacy and legality.²⁷ Expectations were low that this conference would result in a settlement or be implemented in the country.²⁸ The agreement stuck to the original confessional system, but reduced the power of the Christian president, increased the power of the Sunni prime minister and Shia speaker of parliament, and equalized the number of Christian and Muslim members in Parliament.²⁹ The agreement also legitimized Syrian presence in the country.³⁰

The settlement at Taif was a big step forward since it addressed the underlying causes of the conflict, but implementation led to additional violence. A leading Christian element rejected the agreement because it allowed the Syrians to remain in the country, and continued to resist Syrian, Muslim, and other Christian forces. Fighting and political debate continued for another year, but the United States agreed to let the Syrians defeat these elements in exchange for Syrian support against Saddam Hussein after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.³¹ These actions paved the way for final resolution of the civil war, the demobilization of militias, and the return to relative normalcy throughout the country.

The conflict termination models provide useful perspectives to view the evolution of negotiations in the Lebanese civil war including the changing actors, conditions, and

interests that complicated the negotiating process. The structure of the Lebanese civil war favored negotiations. The Lebanese civil war did not follow the standard model of a government threatened by an insurgency since many of the warring factions were in the government or were extensions of the government. Negotiations were often between leaders within the executive branch and leaders in the legislative branch, and this peculiar structure made terms like “the opposition” irrelevant. It also meant that both sides pursued a negotiated settlement to the conflict despite high levels of violence and casualties, since neither side aimed to overthrow the government. The underlying causes of the conflict, primarily political reform, were known from the very beginning, but negotiating a settlement required getting both sides to the negotiating table, getting an agreement, and implementing the agreement. Resolving the underlying causes also meant that there was a power-sharing arrangement in the post-conflict government in accordance with the credible commitment theory.

The Lebanese civil war showed the complexity of internal actors and their influence on the outcome of the war. Inter-Muslim and inter-Christian disputes were just as much a part of the conflict as any Christian versus Muslim fighting. Shia and Druze influence eclipsed Sunni power with the assistance of Syrian and Iranian forces. Tensions between Christian elements erupted into open violence later in the war. These internal competitions shaped the negotiations throughout the course of the war.

Battlefield conditions often drove both sides to the negotiating table and influenced their negotiating positions. Spikes in violence or perceived stalemates led to negotiations both in 1984 and 1989. In 1984, the president agreed to form a unity government when Muslim forces shelled the presidential palace.³²

The Lebanese civil war also illustrated the powerful role of outside actors. Syria, Israel, France, and the United States all played significant roles in the civil war. Iran provided training and assistance to elements such as Lebanese Hezbollah while other regional actors such as Saudi Arabia and the Arab League attempted to mediate the dispute. Syria's historical, ethnic, and religious ties to Lebanon led it to take a leading role in the country and to commit substantial resources to ensure its interests were protected. It intervened early in the war, and remained long after the final agreement.³³

A Syrian Taif?

Many observers began calling for a "Syrian Taif" soon after the outbreak of the civil war, but others do not believe a confessional form of government will work in Syria.³⁴ Some observers point to the similarities in religious groups and believe that any final resolution of the conflict will have to find a way to guarantee the rights of Christians, Muslims, and Kurds within the country.³⁵ The guiding document for the United Nations and Arab League that forms the basis for current negotiations pursues a negotiated settlement that protects all ethnic and religious communities.³⁶ Others, however, point to the demographic differences that make a confessional system in Syria more difficult.³⁷ Lakhdar Brahimi, the United Nations representative for Syria, mediated the original Taif Accord, and understands the challenges of directly applying the same model to Syria.³⁸

Conflict resolution models indicate that any final agreement will need to provide an effective and guaranteed power-sharing arrangement that includes both sides of the conflict. This concept is particularly challenging in Syria based on historical experience in Syria.³⁹ Lebanon has a tradition of power-sharing democracy before their civil war while Syrian has been ruled by an autocratic ruling family for forty years.⁴⁰ The Assad

regime has no intent to give up power, and is planning a national election for this summer.⁴¹ Structurally the conflict is also different. Unlike Lebanon where both sides had representatives in the government and had no desire to completely overthrow the political system, this civil war is between a government and an opposition that seeks to fundamentally change the political structure.

The current battlefield conditions in Syria are not conducive to a negotiated settlement despite the relative stalemate that exists. Many observers point to the relative equality between government and opposition forces to conclude that the regime will negotiate.⁴² The Assad regime accepted operational risk by withdrawing from Kurdish controlled territory, and the regime appeared to be slipping into defeat earlier in the conflict.⁴³ However, the regime remains in a strong position, and likely views time as favorable to staying in power. The regime remains in control of Damascus and key links to Lebanon. The army remains fairly stable after earlier defections. Increased Iranian and Russian support is providing valuable weapons and money.⁴⁴ New operational forces such as Lebanese Hizballah and regime militias are proving very capable at fighting opposition forces. Zartman's "mutually hurting stalemate" requires both sides to see negotiations as the best alternative, but the Assad regime clearly views fighting as the best current alternative.

The internal politics of the opposition reduces the chance of an agreement in the near term. Numerous opposition groups ranging from moderate elements to more extremist Islamist and Al-Qaeda affiliated movement are fighting the government, fighting each other, and competing for international support.⁴⁵ Several are based in other countries, and have little support among the Syrian population. Recent surveys of

Syrians living in the country indicate a disconnect between the motives of those fighting in the war and those suffering from the war.⁴⁶ These dynamics will continue to play out in coming years at the negotiating table.

Civil wars create favorable conditions for extremist groups and militias, and they tend to remain long after the war is over. They often have patrons outside the country, and seek goals that are not necessarily tied to the original conflict. Extremist groups appeared in Lebanon very early in the civil war, and ranged from Palestinian militant groups to communists. Groups splintered and new ones formed as the war evolved resulting in a complex array of extremist groups with different objectives.

Lebanese Hezbollah is one example that demonstrates the long term, regional impact of extremist groups that emerge from civil wars. They began in response to the Israeli intervention in Lebanon, and quickly emerged as capable force focused on resisting the Israeli occupation. They refused to disarm following the Taif accord, and remain a “state within a state” today with ties to Iran and Syria. They have comparable capabilities to the Lebanese army and fought a war with Israel in 2006. They continue to be a source of instability in the region, and are a permanent fixture in the regional landscape.

The Syrian civil war is already attracting numerous Islamist and Al-Qaeda associated groups as part of the opposition movement. An estimated 23,000 violent extremists including more than 7,000 foreign fighters from North Africa, the Middle East, and Europe are already in the country.⁴⁷ Al-Qaeda associated movements and Islamist groups control significant portions of the country and have a presence in most major cities. They are already impacting adjacent countries such as Lebanon, Iraq, and

Turkey.⁴⁸ These groups have no desire to negotiate any type of agreement, and seek to overthrow the Assad regime. Syria threatens to become a regional hub for Al-Qaeda.

Implementation of any agreement is another challenge that the international community will need to resolve. Negotiations will fail unless a credible implementation force is part of the agreement. Syria filled that important role for Lebanon, and committed as many as 30,000 soldiers for several years. Syria will be a much tougher challenge, and no single country is capable and willing to fill that role for Syria. A negotiated agreement without an implementation force is likely to fail, and the combatants will return to fighting.

Finally, the conflict does not end with a negotiated settlement. Implementing the terms of the agreement, disarmament of militias, reintegration and reconciliation all take time and support by the international community. The state often emerges from the conflict weakened and less capable of exerting control over its territory or providing for its population. Lebanon provides a great example of the difficult path for a country after conflict. Constitutional crises, political instability, and a war with Israel are all part of the post conflict environment. The United States provided more than \$800 million in security assistance to Lebanon since 2006 to build security capabilities in the Lebanese armed forces.⁴⁹The international community will have a far greater requirement in Syria.

Regional Competition and Cooperation

In the Lebanese civil war, regional and global actors provide funding, assistance, political support, and military forces to both sides. Syria considered Lebanon its primary sphere of influence due to historical, ethnic, and economic ties, and it wanted to maintain close ties with Lebanon to protect its flank from any Israeli incursion. As a result, Syria played an active role in the internal politics of Lebanon including supporting

both sides of the civil war at various times when it suited Syrian interests. Israel's interest in maintaining a buffer zone in the south to limit attacks on its territory led it to directly intervene in the country on multiple occasions and fund Lebanese security forces that would counter Muslim militias in the country. Syria and Israel acknowledged that each country had important interests within the country and sought ways to cooperate. The United States maintained direct ties to Syria, and communicated its intentions with Russia throughout the civil war to prevent misunderstanding. The war finally ended when all parties agreed to end the war and applied pressure to their respective clients.

Global actors such as the United Nations, United States and Russia, regional actors such as the Arab league, Saudi Arabia and Iran, and neighboring states such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey have mutual interests in ending the Syrian conflict and limiting its effects in the region. Syrian chemical weapons, refugees in neighboring states, the humanitarian crisis in Syria, and violent extremist groups destabilize the region, and are all common interests between states. Russian interests include ensuring it supports its only ally in the Mediterranean. Iran has even greater interests in maintaining a key ally, and providing a key logistical link to Hezbollah. A new regime in Damascus will likely be less favorable to maintaining their relationship and protecting their interests. Continuing to pursue a negotiated settlement that does not account for everyone's interests will fail.

Recommended U.S. Policy Approach

The Syrian civil war and its consequences will remain at the forefront of U.S. efforts in the Middle East for many years because of its geo-political position and proximity to regional partners. The United States should seek to end the conflict as

quickly as possible, strengthen regional partners' ability to mitigate the effects of the conflict, and begin planning and coordination to manage long-term challenges. Syria will need international assistance to rebuild state institutions, alleviate humanitarian suffering, reconcile the opposition, and facilitate refugee return regardless of how the conflict ends.

The United States should look for opportunities to build moderate opposition unity and capacity. Significant challenges remain to reaching a negotiated settlement in accordance with the Geneva Communiqué, and a fractured opposition undermines those attempts. These efforts should range from initiatives to unify the different groups to providing support and assistance in areas under opposition control. The United States should increase efforts to build the opposition's military capability in order to place greater pressure on the Assad regime to negotiate. The United States must also send clear messages to Iran and Russia that it is willing to sustain the effort to accomplish its goals. These messages could include increased military planning and preparation to conduct limited military operations.

The United States should look to develop a regional framework to resolve the Syria conflict and reduces Sunni-Shia regional competition currently manifesting itself in Syria. The Arab League is the only regional mechanism in place to address the current conflict, and it excludes Iran. Regional states such as Saudi Arabia and Iran have far more at stake and view Syria as a vital national interest that requires complete commitment, and a diplomatic approach must include both sides to succeed.

As the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance stated, "Our defense efforts in the Middle East will be aimed at countering violent extremists and destabilizing threats, as

well as upholding our commitment to allies and partner states.”⁵⁰ Al-Qaeda affiliated organizations and Islamist groups operating in Syria present a long-term threat to regional partners, Europe, and U.S. interests that will persist after resolution of the current conflict. The United States needs to continue to develop a regional approach to disrupt and defeat these extremist organizations including working with Iran and Russia against common threats. Iraq is particularly vulnerable to the long-term impact of having a terrorist safe haven in western Iraq and eastern Syria.

Finally, the United States should review its national security structure to ensure it integrates U.S. national power in the Syrian conflict. The conflict is regional and whole of government in nature. It extends across multiple military geographic combatant command boundaries as well as State Department regional bureaus. Many issues , such as violent extremist flow across multiple continents, requires an effective interagency structure that addresses the long-term interests of the United States.

Conclusion

The Lebanese civil war provides useful insights for today’s international community with respect to Syria. First, the international community plays an essential role in resolving the conflict and mitigating its effects in the region. The Syrian civil war is complex and difficult to resolve, but the United States and international community have mutual interests in limiting the long term instability caused by the civil war. Continued competition between external actors such as the United States, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Iran will prolong the civil war. Second, a negotiated settlement is possible, but many of the conditions are not present currently for a settlement. Settlements must address the underlying grievances of the conflict and include an effective power-sharing arrangement in the post-conflict government. Settlements must

also have an outside power guarantee security during the transition phase to enforce the terms of the agreement. Finally, Lebanon showed that outside powers must remain engaged for many years after the conflict to help the country rebuild into a functional state. Refugees, violent extremist organizations, disarmament, rebuilding the security forces, repairing a broken economy, and establishing a new government will take years and international support. The challenges are great, and the crisis demands strong U.S. leadership.

Endnotes

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²⁹ Karam Karam, "The Taif Agreement New Order, Old Framework," *Accord*, no. 24, 36. <http://www.c-r.org/accord-article/taif-agreement> (accessed April 12, 2014).

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³⁷ Muslims are in the majority in Lebanon, but are divided among Sunni and Shia. Christians are approximately 40% of the population. Syria is 80% Sunni.

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