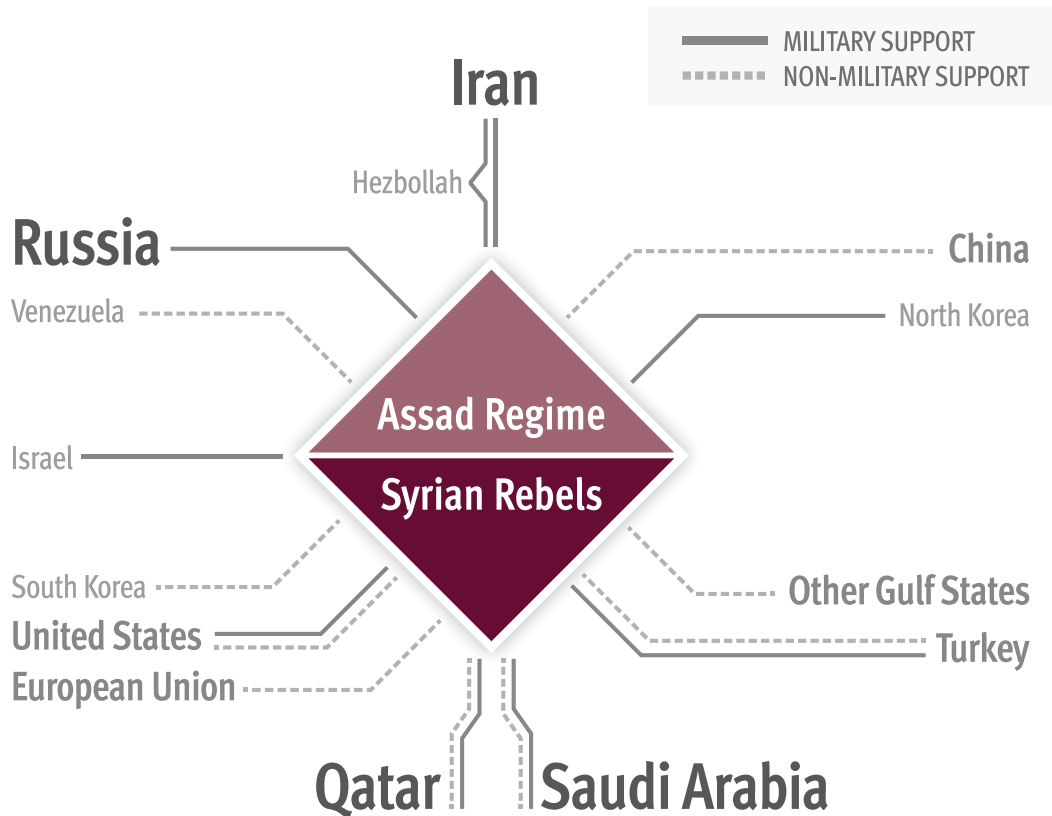


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*Asan Report*

**The Syrian Civil War and  
its Implications for Korea**

JANG JI-HYANG and PETER LEE

SEPTEMBER 27, 2013

The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

## About

**The Asan Institute for Policy Studies** is an independent, non-partisan think tank that undertakes policy-relevant research to foster domestic, regional, and international environments that promote peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula, East Asia, and the world-at-large.

**The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Center** provides timely analysis of the major trends and developments unfolding across the Middle East and North Africa as well as their implications for the Korean Peninsula.

## Authors

**JANG Ji-Hyang** is a Research Fellow and the Director of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Center at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies. She also serves as a Policy Advisor on Middle East issues to South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Previously, she taught comparative and Middle East politics at Seoul National University, Yonsei University, Ewha Woman's University, and the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. Dr. Jang is the author of numerous books and articles on the Middle East and has most recently published a co-edited book with Clement M. Henry titled, *The Arab Spring: Will It Lead to Democratic Transitions?* (Asan Institute 2012, Palgrave Macmillan 2013) and a Korean translation of Fawaz Gerges' *Journey of the Jihadist: Inside Muslim Militancy* (Asan Institute 2011). She received a B.A. and M.A. from the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies and her Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Texas at Austin.

**Peter LEE** is a Program Officer in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Center at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies. His research focuses on East Asia-Middle East security relations and the role of middle powers in regional affairs. He received a B.A. with Honours and a Master of International Relations (MIR) from the University of Melbourne, Australia.

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## Executive Summary

This report discusses the causes behind the protracted nature of Syria's civil war, how a decisive outcome can be reached, and what South Korea can do to aid such a resolution. It concludes with an analysis of the implications for the Korean Peninsula and offers policy recommendations for what role South Korea should be playing.

### Key Causal Factors

This report contends that there are two factors explaining the Syrian civil war. First, the security establishment and the urban elites have been slow to abandon the hereditary dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad out of fear that the ensuing uncertainty will be worse than the status quo. Second, while Iran, Russia, and China have continued to steadfastly support the regime, the international anti-Assad coalition's competing goals have led to sporadic and incoherent support for the rebel opposition mainly composed of low-ranking conscripts, civilians, and foreign fighters.

### International Policy Recommendations

The current strategy of calling for Assad to step down while cautiously arming the rebels has been ineffective. First, a concerted effort is required to remove key elements of Assad's security apparatus from the current balance of forces by encouraging their defection and providing more aggressive and direct incentives rather than negotiating with the regime's leadership. Breaking up the cohesiveness of the core military elites and triggering an internal coup will be the key to finishing the civil war. Second, there needs to be an agreement

between Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar—the rebel's major supporters—with the United States and European Union on more direct and coordinated military funding and intervention. These countries must also be prepared to offer concessions to Iran, Russia, and China to secure their reluctant acquiescence for Assad's departure, such as assuring them that a pro-Western, radical Sunni regime will not take over.

### South Korean Policy Recommendations

Syria is a test of whether the international community can work together to end civil wars in the face of entrenched resistance, domestically and internationally. As an internationally active middle power, South Korea should continue to use its position at the United Nations Security Council to call upon the Assad regime to respect the rights of civilians. It should significantly increase its aid contribution for Syrian refugees, which is currently only \$5 million. It should also offer greater humanitarian assistance for the more than 2 million refugees residing in neighboring Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq, where its political and economic interests are quite strong.

### Lessons for the Korean Peninsula

Finally, there are important lessons South Korea can learn from the Syrian civil war vis-à-vis North Korea. If North Korea were to experience a sudden, popular uprising that eventually led to civil war, the twin variables of internal cohesion and external division may similarly hold true. After all, both Syria and North Korea are resilient, dynastic hereditary succession regimes dependent on the backing of China, Russia, and Iran. In the event of a North Korean civil war, we may witness the similar kind of regime survival and international stalemate that has prevailed in Syria. Therefore, South Korea

and the international community should focus on two goals: the defection of key military elites and incentivizing China to abandon Kim Jong-un.

First, it will be crucial to focus exclusively on key units in the security establishment strategically located in urban areas, such as the Pyongyang Defense Command and the Guard Command, and facilitate the defection of high-ranking officers by providing amnesties, financial incentives, and evacuation plans. Second, it will be decisive to provide incentives to China, Russia, and Iran to give up their support for Kim Jong-un as the leader of North Korea. The threat of regional economic collapse could incentivize China, in particular, to quickly seek an end to hostilities. While the Syrian civil war has not destroyed the economies and oil production of the region, a prolonged crisis in North Korea will have a devastating effect on China's economy.

## The Syrian Civil War and its Implications for Korea

Jang Ji-Hyang and Peter Lee

September 27, 2013

### Introduction

When the Syrian civil war first began in early 2011, many policymakers and analysts believed that it would not be long before President Bashar al-Assad would go the way of his fellow authoritarian leaders in Tunisia and Egypt. More than two years and 100,000 deaths later, those early assessments have proven wildly premature. Even today, a decisive outcome remains elusive. Total state breakdown in Syria—a country situated at the crossroads of the region's major powers—remains a serious possibility. How this conflict ultimately ends will have enormous ramifications for the region. While we do not know precisely when Assad will fall from power, given the regime that he and his father built, it is clear that any future collapse will be sudden and abrupt. It is because this regime is enormously fragile and the current resilience is based on suppressed volatility.<sup>1</sup>

This paper contends that there are two factors explaining the Syrian civil war. First, the security establishment and the urban elites have been slow to abandon the regime out of fear that the ensuing uncertainty will be worse than the status quo. Ever since Hafez al-Assad came to power in 1970 and consolidated his rule with the backing of a coalition of Baathists, Alawites,

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1. Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *Antifragile: Things That Gain From Disorder* (Random House, 2012).

and religious and ethnic minorities, the ruling Syrian elites have not experienced any leadership selection process. The hereditary succession to his son, Bashar al-Assad, in 2005, further ended any speculation about possible internal leadership contests within the Baath Party. Consequently, even for the non-familial ruling elites, there are no alternative candidates or factions with which to align and so have stayed with the incumbent autocratic regime.

***The hereditary succession to his son, Bashar al-Assad, in 2005, further ended any speculation about possible internal leadership contests within the Baath Party.***

Second, while Iran, Russia, and China have continued to steadfastly support the regime, the international anti-Assad coalition's competing goals have led to sporadic and incoherent support for the opposition. The anti-Assad coalition has failed to systematically coordinate its methods and channels of assistance. For instance, Saudi Arabia and Qatar ratchet up their financial and military support for like-minded rebel factions. Turkey has struggled with domestic political costs caused by a mass refugee crisis and border skirmishes and remains concerned about keeping its international reputation as an active moderator at the same time. Outside the region, the European Union shows limited ability to make a decisive contribution in Syria. Its protracted economic crisis and dwindling military capabilities have hampered its efforts in other crises such as Libya or Mali. And, finally, after a decade of failed interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States has made clear it has no intention of

***After a decade of failed interventions, the United States has no intention of intervening in Syria despite multiple "red lines."***

intervening in Syria despite multiple "red line" warnings against the Assad regime. After all, supporting the rebels has been a much more costly endeavor than for those propping up the regime.

Rather than attempting to predict when the regime will fall, it is more useful to consider how that transition will occur. How the Syrian civil war ends will be determined by internal coups and external cooperation. In this context, three scenarios appear to be the most plausible. First, the regime may fall due to internal elite conflict and a possible coup as the situation becomes more desperate, and Assad's failure become more undeniable. Second, the different rebel factions may finally coalesce under the direction of a better-equipped and better-financed Free Syrian Army and go on to win the battle for Damascus. Finally, the international anti-Assad coalition under the auspices of the Friends of Syria may agree upon a single and simple coordinated policy governing all aspects of aid, sanctions, and thresholds for military intervention, starving the regime of vital logistical and military support.

This paper will discuss the causes behind the protracted nature of Syria's civil war, those conditions under which a decisive outcome is likely to be reached, and the consequences for Syria and the wider region. The paper will offer policy recommendations for what role South Korea should be playing and suggest some of the implications of the conflict for the Korean Peninsula. Given the two factors that explain the Syrian civil war, the main implications for an abrupt North Korean uprising and civil war are two-fold. First, the internal cohesion of core military units will be too strong to overthrow Kim Jong-un's regime. Thus, South Korea should not target the surrounding political elites for defection and coups but rather the high-ranking officers. Second, external division in the international community will be an obstacle to produce a coordinated policy to win over China and Russia, the Kim regime's

key supporters. Moreover, in order to win concessions from these two countries, the international community should build a simple but strong agreement highlighting their critical economic interests in the stabilization of the Korean Peninsula.<sup>2</sup>

### Optimistic Predictions, Disastrous Outcomes

What originally began as part of the wave of popular protests known as the “Arab Spring” has now transformed into a protracted conflict pitting a disparate constellation of rebel factions against Assad’s deeply resilient regime. But why did events unfold this way? Why did Assad not step down like President Zine Ben Ali in Tunisia or Hosni Mubarak in Egypt? Why has the international community been highly reluctant to militarily intervene to protect the Syrian people as it had in Libya?

Initially, many pundits were optimistic in their predictions of the imminent demise of Assad’s regime. Viewed through the prism of the Arab uprisings, most thought it was only a matter of time before he would go the way of his fellow authoritarian leaders. For more than two years, there have been endless rebel and observer claims of how each new massacre, defection, rebel victory or international resolution marked a turning point in the conflict.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, as the situation has deteriorated, we have watched the Assad regime cross numerous so-called “red lines.” First, it was the indiscriminate killing of unarmed protestors. Next, it was the massacres in Sunni villages

2. Jang Ji-Hyang and Peter Lee, “Middle East Q&A: Intervening in Syria and Lessons for North Korea,” *Asan Issue Brief* (2013).

3. Policy Analysis Unit, “The Recent Bombings in Syria: Do they change reality on the ground?” *Policy Analysis, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies* (June 2012).

that shocked the world. Then, it was threat of regional spillover and radicalization of the rebel factions. Today, the use of chemical weapons to kill more than 1,400 people suggests that the regime has crossed yet another serious and definite red line.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, the regime has held on. Kofi Annan and his six-point peace plan proposal are a distant memory, and the current UN envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, seems equally bereft of solutions. The violence has left more than 100,000 dead and more than 4 million people displaced by some counts. Despite being a shell of its former self, the core of the Assad regime has managed to hold onto the key coercive institutions of power in this war-torn wasteland. Even as the weight of the world moves inexorably against him, Assad has continued his brutal campaign against both the disparate rebels and his own citizens largely undeterred.

***The core of the Assad regime has managed to hold onto the key coercive institutions of power.***

So why has Syria’s uprising unfolded so differently from the rest of the Arab Spring? After nearly two years of political upheaval across the Middle East and North Africa, there has been a debate of why the uprisings have followed such different trajectories. Despite protests occurring in nearly every country in the region, there have only been serious, lasting mass protests in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain, and Syria. And of these, only Tunisia and

4. Julie Tate, “The administration’s arguments for striking Syrian targets,” *The Washington Post* (September 10, 2013) and Office of the Press Secretary, “Statement by Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes on Syrian Chemical Weapons Use,” The White House (June 13, 2013).



Egypt's protests succeeded in removing their rulers relatively quickly and non-violently.

Across the region, regimes have resorted to a range of tactics to preserve the status quo. Despite the exit of Yemen's Ali Abdullah Saleh, the country appears to have become stuck in political paralysis as decades-old rivalries and regional allegiances inhibit meaningful progress. In others, such as Jordan and Morocco, leaders have offered de-jure constitutional reforms while replacing unpopular administrations to appease their populations. Meanwhile, the oil-rich Gulf monarchies have tried to buy their way out of the protests with cash handouts and public projects.

In contrast, where the regime has chosen to respond with violence and coercion we have witnessed an even greater variety of outcomes. Saudi Arabia's military intervention in Bahrain as part of the Peninsula Shield Force has ensured that the al-Khalifa monarchy remains unlikely to contemplate meaningful reforms anytime soon. In sharp contrast, Libya descended into a full-scale civil war that left thousands dead before intervention by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) backed by Gulf oil money finally helped the rebels overthrow Colonel Muammar Qadhafi.

This diversity of outcomes presents important insights for Syria's conflict. Without knowing the key driving factors that have allowed the violence to continue for so long vis-à-vis the rest of the region, international responses are just as likely to exacerbate the situation as they are to resolve it. While there are certainly a diverse range of factors that are prolonging the conflict, two factors have been critical to sustaining Assad's regime: internal cohesion and external fragmentation.

### Military Cohesion, Elite Loyalty, and Weak Rebels

Ever since Assad chose to respond to the initial wave of protests with a brutal security crackdown, Syrian military and security forces have been a pivotal factor in the civil war's outcome. In this vein, the role of the Syrian opposition organized under the banner of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) has been the key to Assad's removal and an end to the conflict. Growing defections among the regime's armed forces, particularly since the creation of the FSA in July 2011, have been cited as evidence of the regime's inevitable downfall. The majority of Syria's roughly 300,000 military personnel have either de-

***The regime has held on with roughly 50,000 core troops—less than a fifth of its original strength.***

fected to the opposition or simply left their posts and fled, leaving the regime with roughly 50,000 core troops—less than a fifth of its original strength—to defend itself.<sup>5</sup>

However, these defections have been among the predominantly Sunni conscripts and low-ranking officers in the armed forces, particularly from the army. In contrast, key elements of the professional Syrian military and security services have remained steadfastly loyal to the regime.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Assad

5. International Institute for Strategic Studies, *IISS Military Balance 2013*, p. 403. For detailed breakdowns of key security units, see Human Rights Watch, "Appendix 1: Structure and Command of Armed Forces and Intelligence Agencies," in "By All Means Necessary," *Human Rights Watch Report* (December 16, 2011) and International Institute for Strategic Studies, *IISS Military Balance 2011*, p. 330-332.

6. Yet, there have been some high profile Sunni defections over the course of the war, such as Brigadier General Manaf Tlass of the Republican Guard in July 2012 and Prime Minister Riad Hijab in August 2012. The defection of General Ali Habib, who served as Defense Minister until the

has long sought to protect himself from the forces of change by relying upon a patrimonial coercive apparatus of a powerful and loyal security establishment. By fostering a system in which many officers have come to view their personal survival as contingent upon the survival of the regime, the prospect of military or political defeat has spurred a fierce response by these core units.

In contrast, the role that the military and security services have played in the region's other uprisings illustrates how that cohesion has produced widely different results [See Figure 1]. For instance, in Tunisia, owing to Ben Ali's personal background in the public security services, the regime relied upon the security and intelligence forces in the Interior Ministry to maintain order while subordinating the military and excluding it from its patronage networks.<sup>7</sup> Thus, when the uprisings began in Tunisia, the military quickly stepped in to protect the public. In Egypt, the military establishment led by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) similarly did not regard Mubarak as essential to its survival. This was partly because its vast economic interests were autonomous of the president's own patronage networks, but also because its high standing in Egyptian society and privileged relationship with the US shielded it from the demands of the protestors.

start of the civil war, is notable given he is an Alawite member of the regime. See, "Interactive: Tracking Syria's defections," *Al Jazeera* (May 11, 2013), available at <http://visual.ly/tracking-syrias-defections?view=true>. On the defection of General Habib, see Khaled Yacoub Oweis and Amena Bakr, "Exclusive: Former Syria defense minister defects in break with Assad," *Reuters* (September 4, 2013).

7. Robert Springborg and Clement M. Henry, "Army Guys," *The American Interest* (May/June 2011); Lisa Anderson, "Early Adopters and Neighborhood Effects," in Clement Henry and Jang Ji-Hyang (eds.), *The Arab Spring: Will It Lead to Democratic Transitions?* (Seoul: The Asan Institute for Policy Studies, 2012) p. 32.

On the other hand, Libya's armed forces quickly fragmented once the uprising against Qadhafi began, with mass defections of entire military units along pro- and anti-government lines, but also regional and tribal lines. Consequently, Qadhafi had to rely upon his core military forces based out of the capital of Tripolitania and hire mercenaries from sub-Saharan Africa to try and put down the rebels in what rapidly evolved into a full-scale civil war.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, had it not been for international intervention to stop Qadhafi's forces from engaging in violent massacres in Benghazi and other eastern cities, the conflict would have ended very differently.

Figure 1. Military and Opposition Cohesion Levels in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, and Libya

		Security Establishment Cohesion	
		High	Low
Opposition Cohesion	High	Egypt	Tunisia
	Low	Syria	Libya

8. Dirk Vandewalle, "After Qadhafi: The Surprising Success of the New Libya," *Foreign Affairs* (September 16, 2012).

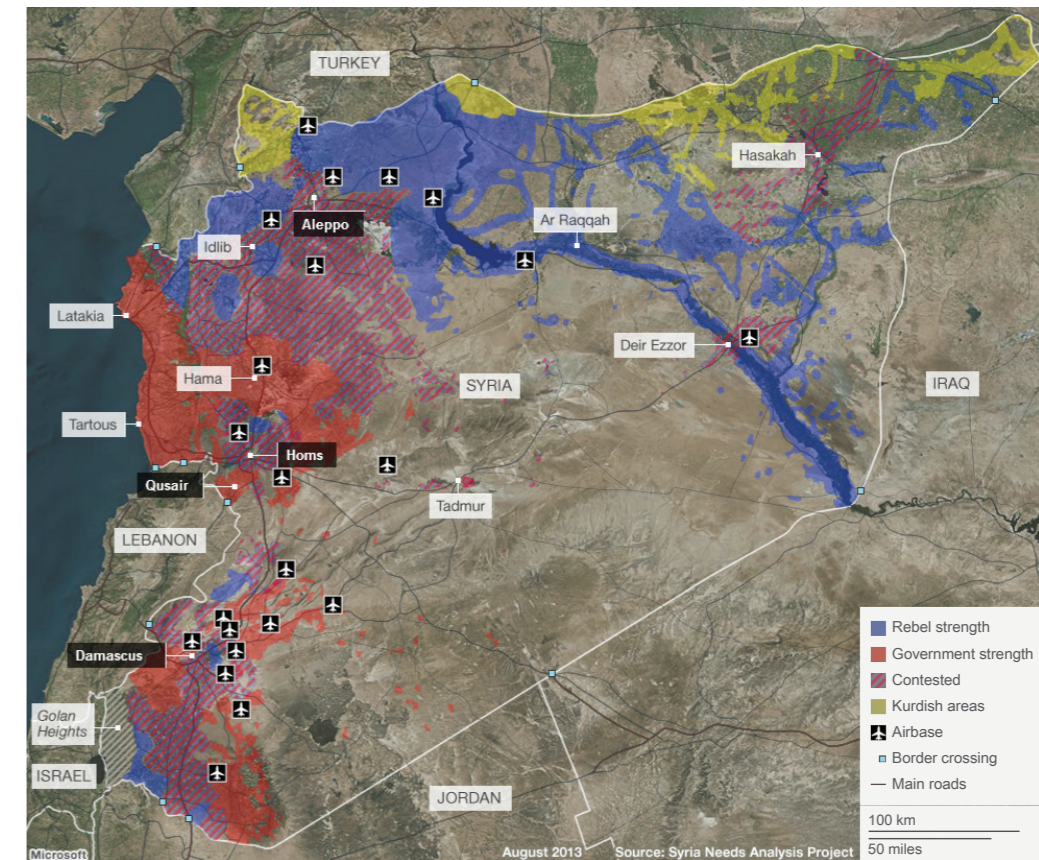
In Syria, by contrast, Assad and his father used the Republican Guard, Special Forces, Air Force, and intelligence services as a parallel military in competition with the conventional ground forces. The purpose of this parallel military was not to defeat the conventional army, but rather to prevent potential coups and put down disloyal forces in the immediate vicinity of the critical points of the regime.<sup>9</sup> This strategy was brutally illustrated in 1982 when core regime units successfully put down a rebellion by the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood in Hama by cordoning off the city and killing over 20,000 people.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to this cohesive security establishment, the urban ruling elites of the Baath Party strongly supported the hereditary dictatorship in order to reduce any possibility of internal power struggle and uncertainty. Despite common portrayals of the civil war as a typical sectarian conflict between Alawites and Sunnis, the loyal elites in big cities are composed of Christians, Druze, Kurds and Alawites as distinguished Baathists or state class. This elite loyalty was possible because numerous challengers were already severely purged through inner party struggles even before Hafez al-Assad took power in 1970. This made it much easier for the remaining elites to acquire prevailing knowledge that no one can replace him and later his son and maintained their loyalty for risk reduction.

This shows why the rebels have faced so much difficulty in capturing and holding strategically important urban areas [See Figure 2]. Early in the uprisings, many of Assad's elite units remained stationed around cities such as Damascus and Aleppo while it deployed conventional ground forces moni-

tored by loyal regiments into the rural countryside. Assad's reliance upon a select number of elite divisions has ensured that his security network has been able to survive largely intact. Many of these divisions have continued fighting consecutively for nearly two years, largely without replacements or troop rotations, even as the ranks of the rebel forces have grown exponen-

Figure 2. Distribution of Forces in Syria



Source: "Syria: Mapping the conflict," *BBC* (September 3, 2013). Data compiled from Syria Needs Analysis Project based on reports from human rights and opposition activists, as well as from the official Syrian Arab News Agency (Sana) and international journalists.

9. James T. Quinlivan, "Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East," *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Autumn 1999) p. 140-141.

10. Raymond Hinnebusch, "Modern Syrian Politics," *History Compass*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2008) p. 271.

tially over that same period. Yet these units have had fewer defections compared with the largely conscript-based, Sunni-dominated infantry divisions.

All of this has had important ramifications for the structural composition of the FSA. We have seen a diverse constellation of constantly changing rebel groups pitted against the most hard-line elements of the vast Syrian military machine. These rebel groups—mainly composed of low-ranking conscripts, civilians, and foreign fighters—have had to battle against professional senior soldiers backed by heavy weapons and air support. Thus, oftentimes, the conflict between the two forces has appeared more like a guerilla insurgency by the FSA than a civil war. This uneven military balance has created few incentives for regime loyalists to defect.

Even as external supporters begin providing military and financial aid, the lack of high-ranking military defections has severely deprived the opposition of much-needed expertise and experience with which to effectively organize. Unlike in Libya, where

***The lack of high-ranking military defections has severely deprived the opposition of much-needed expertise and experience.***

the early defection of many officers and entire units allowed the opposition to quickly organize an operational chain of command and collaborate between different militias and rebel groups, the Syrian National Council and the FSA have struggled to articulate a viable alternative to the incumbent regime's forces.

### **Committed Axis, Ambivalent Coalition**

At the international level, a stalemate has emerged between Assad's sup-

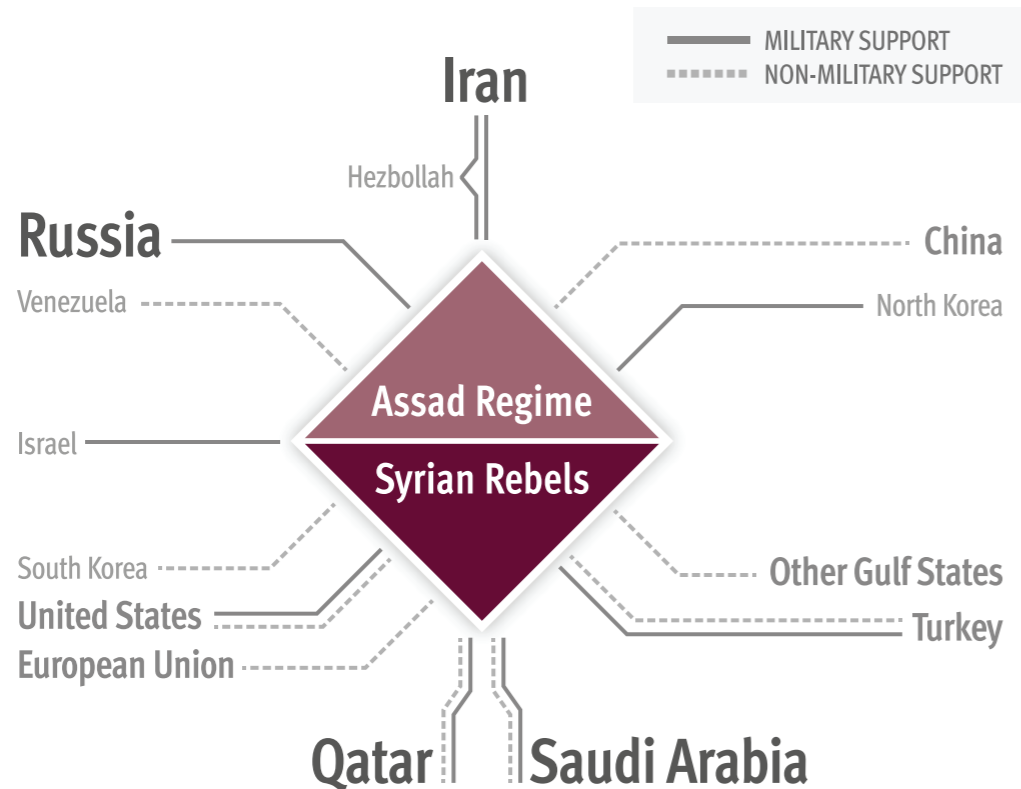
porters and the international community. For Iran, Syria is the critical battleground on which the region's future sectarian configuration will be decided.<sup>11</sup> Having watched nominally secular regimes be replaced with conservative Sunni governments, Tehran views the Arab Spring as a dangerous phenomenon. The situation in Syria represents the climax of this phenomenon, with an amalgamation of hard-line Sunni extremists and foreign jihadists threatening to spill across borders. In addition, at a geostrategic level, the loss of the Assad regime would damage Iran's ability to influence events further afield in the Levant. That is why it has worked closely with Hezbollah to increase its support for the regime through ground troops, military advisors, and arms sales.

Russia and China also continue to provide the regime with diplomatic cover by vetoing United Nations Security Council (UNSC) sanctions proposals. Russia has maintained its military ties with the regime, with almost \$20 billion in arms sales and the protection of its naval base on the coast at Tartus. Beyond economic and security ties to Syria, both Russia and China view the current civil war as a test of their ability to hold the US and EU accountable to the Security Council. Whereas the international community was able to intervene in Libya by securing Russian and Chinese acquiescence to what was initially presented as a limited action, the use of the UNSC mandate for regime change has hardened their resolve to prevent a similar case unfolding in Syria.<sup>12</sup>

11. Frederick W. Kagan, et al., "Iranian Influence in the Levant, Egypt, Iraq, and Afghanistan," *Report, American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War* (May 2012) p. 14-31.

12. "S/PV. 6627: Middle East Situation," *United Nations Security Council Meeting Records* (October 4, 2011) p. 4. Available at <<http://www.un.org/en/sc/meetings/records/2011.shtml>>. Also see, Ruslan Pukhov, "Why Russia Is Backing Syria," *The New York Times* (July 6, 2012).

Figure 3. Key External Supporters in the Syrian Civil War



Source: The Asan Institute for Policy Studies. Notes: For datas, see appendix.

Meanwhile, those states that have called for Assad to step down have largely been unable to effect any meaningful change in the Syrian conflict. The leading regional supporters of Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, as well as the US and EU have all pursued their own agendas in support of the rebels, even as they attempt to coordinate with each other. Furthermore, there is no coherent agenda surrounding what these states are ultimately seeking to achieve by ousting Assad.

In Turkey, Prime Minister Tayyip Recep Erdogan has changed his position

from a few years ago when he saw Assad as a regional partner by being one of the first to call for his resignation. Having since staked his credibility on ousting Assad, he has struggled to overcome Turkey's limited military capabilities, insufficient funding, the ongoing internal conflict with Kurdish rebels, and lack of support from the US and EU. All of this has undermined Erdogan's goal to make Turkey a respected, independent regional power broker. Moreover, the Taksim Square protests in May 2013, the country's largest ever anti-government protests tainted his image as the most admired leader after the Arab Spring and eventually made his big bet on Syria quite a risky and daunting task.

For Saudi Arabia, the overriding concern in Syria has been to stop growing Iranian influence.<sup>13</sup> Using its vast oil wealth, it has financially backed those groups that it views as most loyal to its cause. Consequently, Saudi Arabia has been accused of arming radical Sunni Islamist rebel groups with a distinctly sectarian agenda. For Qatar, however, the Syrian civil war has been viewed within the broader context of the Arab Spring and particularly its success in Libya. During that campaign, it was able to play a disproportionately large role and built a reputation that this oil-rich monarchy is not a counter-revolutionary like Saudi Arabia. It appears that Sheikh Al Thani is seeking to move ahead of the curve and emerge as the savior of the Syrian people.

With this in mind, it is significant that the world's preeminent superpowers have actually played a very limited role during the Syrian crisis. The US and EU have remained hesitant to commit troops or impose a no-fly-zone fearing that the Syrian civil war could become a potential quagmire akin to Iraq or

13. Uzi Rabi and Chelsi Mueller, "Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the Syrian Uprising," *Tel Aviv Notes*, Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Vol. 6, No. 17 (September 10, 2012).

Afghanistan.<sup>14</sup> Their apprehension towards direct intervention or support, even after the undeniable use of chemical weapons against civilians, suggests that they intend to leave the struggle to indigenous forces and neighboring countries. The US, indeed, has been trying to pivot to Asia and to “lead from behind” as its big foreign policy agenda.

### How to End the Prolonged Syrian Crisis

How can the international community move to change these variables of domestic cohesion and an international environment that favors the regime and hinders the opposition? The current strategy of calling for Assad to step down while cautiously arming the rebels is, in and of itself, too insufficient and ambivalent to end the prolonged violence.

First, a concerted effort is required to remove core elements of Assad’s security apparatus from the current balance of forces, either through encouraging their defection or targeting those forces more directly. The international community should focus on convincing key elements of the Syrian military establishment, especially the Republican Guard and Special Forces, to defect rather than trying to negotiate with the regime’s political leadership. It is the core military apparatus of roughly 50,000 troops that must be separated from Assad.

***Focus on convincing key elements of the Syrian military establishment to defect rather than trying to negotiate with the regime’s political leadership.***

14. Marc Lynch, “Pressure Not War: A Pragmatic and Principled Policy Towards Syria,” *Policy Brief, Center for a New American Security* (February 2012).

This must also involve the use of aggressive cash incentives and definitive guarantees by the rebel forces and the international community that the minority groups to which many of these soldiers belong will be protected in a post-Assad Syria. While this may seem untenable given the growing sectarian nature of the violence, it is crucial that those core units feel that the security of their families and tribal, religious, and ethnic groups is not solely dependent on Assad. Indeed, seeking to defeat them through force of arms alone will do little for post-regime stability or reconstruction, even if Assad were to be removed quickly.

Second, at the international level, Russian and Chinese resistance at the UNSC should be taken as a strong indicator that the international status quo is likely to prevail for some time to come. While there are few easy solutions to overcoming the challenges presented by the regime’s backers, there are some questions that those states advocating regime change should first agree upon. In order to give unified and coordinated support to the FSA, the international anti-Assad coalition should at minimum agree on building a new Syria only without Assad, a man who has used chemical weapons against his own people. Issues with al-Qaeda-related forces within the FSA, the transfer of weapons of mass destruction, and Hezbollah’s activities should not be discussed for now since these are not minimalist and urgent goals that the international coalition can collectively agree upon. Not having detailed goals might also serve to provide Iran, Russia, and China with incentives to give up their current support for Assad. Rather, there needs to be agreement between Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar—those states already actively supporting the rebels—with the US and EU on more direct and coordinated military funding and intervention only in order to get rid of Assad and a handful of the surrounding elites.

However, the international coalition does not seem to share this minimal but strong commitment, and consequently has not coordinated its actions against the Assad regime. The Obama administration has suggested that the use of chemical weapons constitutes a red line that, if crossed, would lead to a severe response. Turkey's Erdogan implied that attacks on Turkish territory would be met with retaliatory military strikes. With its air strikes on convoys of Syrian armaments heading to Lebanon and its recent air strikes in and around Damascus, Israel has made clear that any attempt to smuggle heavy weapons to its enemies would be preemptively attacked.<sup>15</sup> Saudi Arabia and Qatar, unhindered by direct military confrontation with Assad, have been able to fund the opposition at their own leisure without risking their own security.

The international community must also be prepared to offer concessions to Russia and China to secure their reluctant acquiescence, if not support. So far, the international anti-Assad coalition has not offered any practical reasons for them to change their positions. If the US eventually decides that the violence in Syria has reached a critical threshold, and that it does not wish to unilaterally intervene, then it must be prepared to negotiate on important Russian and Chinese regional interests. A possible concession can be to not allow a pro-Western government to come to power and no de-Baathification in a post-Assad vacuum. Similarly, for Iran to alter its current

***The international community must also be prepared to offer concessions to Russia and China to secure their reluctant acquiescence, if not support.***

15. Aram Nerguizian, "The Difficult Path to Mitigating Risk in Syria," *Center for Strategic and International Studies Commentary* (May 9, 2013).

position, the region's major players such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt could offer to ensure that there will be no radical Sunni regime in a post-Assad Syria. This can be a feasible incentive for Iran to join the negotiations, particularly since it could give newly-elected President Hassan Rouhani leverage over more hard-line factions within his government.

### **Conclusion and Implications for the Korean Peninsula**

We have been witnessing a disastrous civil war in Syria due to a cohesive, core military loyal to the Assad regime and sporadic international responses led by an ambivalent anti-Assad coalition unlike the committed Axis. Domestically and internationally, Assad's backers have fought on in the belief that they are caught in a zero-sum situation against the FSA and the international anti-Assad coalition. The FSA and other rebel factions, in turn, seek to completely overhaul the old political order and its attendant sectarian composition. They will be unlikely to stop with the removal of Assad and the ruling elites.

Given this violent and dystopian paralysis, ending the civil war requires coups within the core elites of Assad's security networks triggered by several incentives. Also, coordination among the international community based upon a short-term, minimalist agreement on ousting only Assad without de-Baathification or 'anything but Assad' is quite crucial. This way will integrate the diverse opposition groups and tame the Islamic jihadists among them. De-Baathification in the post-Saddam Iraq showed that a massive purge and political revenge against the Baath party members in the name of transitional justice and punishment left nothing but a worsened ethno-sectarian conflict, the key hindrance to post-civil war state building.

Then, what should South Korea be doing in light of the enormous human suffering that has occurred over the past two years in transition-required Syria? South Korea is now a member of the UNSC and an emerging global actor in its own right. When it held the presidency of the Security Council in February 2013, South Korea convened a meeting to discuss the protection of civilians in armed conflict, a debate in which Syria figured prominently.<sup>16</sup> So far, there are more than 2 million registered refugees in neighboring Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq with many more unregistered, while inside Syria, there are believed to be more than 4 million people internally displaced. South Korea should continue to push the issue of humanitarian protection by calling upon the Assad regime to respect the rights of civilian populations and international norms. In early September 2013, the South Korean government clearly confirmed its position that the use of chemical weapons cannot be tolerated and supported the international community's action against Assad who killed more than 1,400 people with sarin gas.

Furthermore, in line with the government's focus on building up South Korea's global presence through increased official development assistance and state-building programs, contributing to humanitarian aid in Syria can be an important new initiative. South Korea's aid commitment to Syria so far has totaled approximately only \$5 million: \$1 million in January 2012, \$600,000 in September 2012, and \$3 million at the international donor's conference in Kuwait co-held by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and Emir Sabah al-Sabah in January 2013. There is significant scope for increasing this contribution.

Finally, South Korea can offer support in developing facilities for the more

16. "United Nations Security Council: 6917th Meeting (Resumption 1)," *United Nations Security Council Report* (February 12, 2013).

than 2 million refugees residing in neighboring countries, where its political and economic interests are quite strong. If the host governments experience prolonged instability due to the civil war, this will be detrimental to South Korea's regional trade relations.

***South Korea's aid commitment to Syria so far has totaled approximately only \$5 million.***

Although Syria's lack of oil and gas reserves and the absence of diplomatic relations between the two countries have meant that the war did not register highly among South Korea's concerns, the rogue connection between Syria and North Korea can be a crucial security interest. In sum, South Korea's tasks will not play a crucial part in ending the prolonged crisis in Syria. Rather, in a post-Assad Syria, South Korea will play a more dynamic role in engaging state-building and training state officials.

Also, there are lessons for a Syrian-style civil war in North Korea. First, the key elites in the security establishment are pivotal to maintaining a dictatorial regime's survival. Syria and North Korea are both hereditary succession regimes, although the former is a patrimonial authoritarian regime whereas the latter is a typical totalitarian one based on a single ideology, "*Juche*" or self-reliance. Even though some may highlight the sectarian nature of the conflict between the Alawites and Sunnis in the Syrian civil war, we argue that the confrontation is between the cohesive ruling Baathists, including the Alawites, Christians, Kurds, and even many Sunnis against the anti-Assad forces. In other words, Syria and North Korea are similarly hereditary dictatorial regimes whose support base are the party members and the military. Moreover, both are known for possessing the largest arsenals of weapons of mass destruction in the world.



The dictators of the two countries are excessively dependent on a parallel military strategically located in urban areas. This dependency in North Korea became more distinctive after Kim Jong-il aggressively implemented the military-first policy in the mid-1990s. In the Syrian case, only about 2-3 percent of the entire population, the 50,000 loyal troops deployed in big cities can defend the regime successfully. Presumably, about 50,000 parallel military troops and 20-25,000 key top officers in North Korea are able to secure the longevity of Kim’s regime. Thus, it is decisive to provide strong cash incentives and security guarantees to the core military units so that their defection will hurt the inner cohesion and bring new asymmetry in the parallel military.

**50,000 parallel military troops and 20-25,000 key top officers in North Korea are able to secure the longevity of Kim’s regime.**

Second, the international community should act in a more coordinated way to support the anti-dictatorial opposition. Also, it is crucial to make the committed Axis such as China, Russia, and Iran change their support for the autocratic regime. For this, the international community should try to create strong incentives to secure acquiescence from the dictator’s outside supporters. In the case of North Korea, the incentives for China, the key support for Kim Jong-un’s regime, should be related to its economic interests and quick stabilization of the border areas with North Korea and the de-militarized zone. Whereas the Syrian conflict has not had a debilitating effect on the economies of neighboring states and oil-production in the Gulf, a North Korean civil war would almost certainly wreak havoc in Northeast Asia. Prolonged crisis in North Korea will heavily affect China’s economy in general and China-South Korea trades in specific.

## Appendix

### 1. Details of Selected Regime Supporters in the Syrian Civil War

Assad Regime Supporters				
Country	Type	Support	Details	Source
Iran	M	Military advisors and infantry	Estimated 4,000 Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps troops deployed in June 2013	“Iran to send 4,000 troops to aid President Assad forces in Syria,” <i>The Independent</i> (June 16, 2013)
	E	Economic aid	\$2 billion deposit to Syrian Central Bank	“Iran Gives Syria an Economic Boost,” <i>Voice of America</i> (June 20, 2013)
Hezbollah	M	Infantry	Approximately 4,000 fighters deployed around Damascus, Lebanon-Syria transit routes, and in battle for Qusayr	Aram Nerguizian, “Assessing the Consequences of Hezbollah’s Necessary War of Choice in Syria,” <i>Commentary</i> , Center for Strategic and International Studies (June 17, 2013)
Russia	M	Weapons systems	\$20 billion worth of arms sales, including S-300 missile defense/anti-aircraft systems and Yakhonts antiship cruise missiles	Michael R. Gordon and Eric Schmitt, “Russia Sends More Advanced Missiles to Aid Assad in Syria,” <i>The New York Times</i> (May 16, 2013)
	P	Diplomatic protection	Vetoed 2 UN Security Council resolutions, 1 draft resolution, and opposed 2 UN General Assembly votes	For vetoes, see S/PV.6627 (October 4, 2011) and S/PV.6810 (July 19, 2012). For vetoes of draft resolutions, see S/PV.6711 (February 4, 2012), United Nations Security Council: Meeting Records. Available at < <a href="http://www.un.org/en/sc/meetings/records/2011.shtml">http://www.un.org/en/sc/meetings/records/2011.shtml</a> >. Louis Charbonneau, “Russia blocks U.N. Security Council declaration on Syria’s Qusair,” <i>Reuters</i> (June 2, 2013)
China	P	Diplomatic protection	Vetoed 2 UN Security Council resolutions, 1 draft resolution, and opposed 2 UN General Assembly votes	For vetoes, see S/PV.6627 (October 4, 2011) and S/PV.6810 (July 19, 2012). For vetoes of draft resolutions, see S/PV.6711 (February 4, 2012), United Nations Security Council: Meeting Records. Available at < <a href="http://www.un.org/en/sc/meetings/records/2011.shtml">http://www.un.org/en/sc/meetings/records/2011.shtml</a> >.

Country	Type	Support	Details	Source
North Korea	M	Missile component shipments	445 graphite cylinders used in missiles intercepted enroute to Syria in May 2012	"N. Korea shipped missile parts to Syria: media," <i>AFP</i> (November 13, 2012)
	M	Military advisors	11-15 military advisors in Aleppo	Julian Ryall, "Syria: North Korean military 'advising Assad regime'," <i>The Telegraph</i> (June 6, 2013)
Venezuela	E	Fuel shipments	At least 3 shipments of crude oil worth approximately \$150 million during 2012	Marianna Parraga and Emma Farge, "Exclusive: Venezuela ships fuel to war-torn Syria," <i>Reuters</i> (February 16, 2013)

Note: "Type" column (E: economic, M: military, P: political)

## 2. Details of Selected Opposition Supporters in the Syrian Civil War

Syrian Opposition Supporters				
Country	Type	Support	Details	Source
United States	E	Non-military assistance	Total of \$815 million in food, medical aid, communications equipment	The latest figure as of July 3, 2013 was \$814,022,857, USAID, "Syria." Available at <a href="http://www.usaid.gov/crisis/syria">http://www.usaid.gov/crisis/syria</a>
	M	Military training	Training rebels in Jordan	"US says it will give military aid to Syria rebels," <i>BBC</i> (June 14, 2013)
European Union	E	Economic sanctions	Export bans, oil embargo, investment and financial activity sanctions	Press Release, "Syria: EU economic sanctions to apply until 1 June 2014," Council of the European Union (May 31, 2013)
Saudi Arabia	M	Military supplies	Light infantry weapons, 37+ military cargo flights	C. J. Chivers and Eric Schmitt, "Saudis Step Up Help for Rebels in Syria With Croatian Arms," <i>The New York Times</i> (February 25, 2013)
Qatar	E	Financial aid	Refugee packages for defectors (est. \$50,000) and \$1-3billion in financial assistance to rebels	Roula Khalaf and Abigail Fielding Smith, "Qatar bankrolls Syrian revolt with cash and arms," <i>Financial Times</i> (May 16, 2013)

Country	Type	Support	Details	Source
Qatar	M	Military supplies	More than 85 military cargo flights	Sergio Pecanha, "An Arms Pipeline to the Syrian Rebels," <i>The New York Times</i> (March 24, 2013)
Turkey	M	Military logistics support	Facilitating military cargo transport into Syria	Sergio Pecanha, "An Arms Pipeline to the Syrian Rebels," <i>The New York Times</i> (March 24, 2013)
	P	Hosting Syrian opposition	Over \$500 million in costs	International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria, "Summary Report," United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (January 30, 2013)
Other Gulf States (Kuwait, UAE)	E	Financial aid	Kuwait: \$300 million, Kuwaiti NGOs: \$183 million, UAE: \$300 million	International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria, "Summary Report," United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (January 30, 2013)
South Korea	E	Financial aid	\$5 million	International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria, "Summary Report," United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (January 30, 2013)

Note: "Type" column (E: economic, M: military, P: political)

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By **Jang Ji-Hyang and Peter Lee**

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**Address** 1-176 Shimmunro 2-Ga, Jongno-Gu, Seoul 110-062, Republic of Korea

**Telephone No.** +82-2-730-5842

**Fax** +82-2-730-5876

**Website** [www.asaninst.org](http://www.asaninst.org)

**E-mail** [info@asaninst.org](mailto:info@asaninst.org)

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