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## Syria Has Effectively Ceased to Exist



men were Russian. When told that they were, he replied that there was nothing the Syrian authorities could do.

Six years into the Syrian war, the survival of President Bashar al-Assad's regime is ensured but it has become something of a facade and lacks a strategy for reuniting the country. The sometimes sharply differing interests of Russia and Iran from above, and the local concerns of a myriad array of pro-regime irregular militias from below, are the decisive factors — not the decisions of the country's nominal rulers. This impacts the calculus of the "regime" side in the war, in determining its strategy in the conflict.

Just take a look at how the war has developed since late last year, when things seemed to be going well for the regime. The rebellion had been driven out of its last fingerholds in eastern Aleppo city, seemingly paving the way for the eventual defeat of the insurgency. But five months later, while the general direction of the war has been against the rebels, they appear still far from collapse. Idlib province, areas of Latakia, Hama, northern Aleppo, and large swaths of the south remain in rebel hands.

The rebels in the south received a boost this week when a coalition airstrike targeted forces loyal to Assad that were advancing on a base used by U.S. and British Special Forces. If the United States and its partners are willing to use force to defend allied groups in the area, it is hard to envision how the regime can hope to reestablish its rule there.

Further east, the war against the Islamic State is being prosecuted by a powerful U.S.-backed, Kurdish-led force called the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). This force will shortly embark on the conquest of Raqqa, the last remaining city in Syria fully controlled by the retreating Islamic State.

In other words, the rumors of the death of the rebellion have been greatly overstated. And some of its component parts apparently possess considerable vigor and strength. Does the Assad regime have a strategy for the reunification of the country, or has Syria's fragmentation now become an unavoidable reality?

Reconciliation Affairs Minister Ali Haidar, a businesslike and well-briefed official, is a central figure in the government's attempts to increase the territory under its control. "Reconciliation" is the process whereby the regime and its allies offer rebels and their supporters "safe passage" to rebel-controlled Idlib or Jarabulus, in return for the ceding of the besieged area to government forces. In some areas, rebels and their supporters may stay, as long as they accept the authority of the regime. The latest such "reconciliation" agreement saw the transfer of rebels and their supporters from the towns of Zabadani and Madaya in the western Damascus suburbs to rebel-controlled Idlib.

The Ministry of Reconciliation Affairs, Haider says, could spearhead a "comprehensive political resolution" of the Syrian conflict. More than 100 towns and villages have now "achieved reconciliation," Haider told our delegation, and 3 million Syrians have been included in the reconciliation process, constituting "40 percent of Syrians affected by the war." The regime's strategy appears to be to use these gradual and incremental reconciliations to eventually whittle the rebellion down to nothing.

What Haider failed to mention, however, was that this latest agreement was achieved with the mediation of Qatar, a strong supporter of the rebels. And the various agreements so far have served more to demarcate regime and rebel territory and create more cohesive enclaves than to substantially further increase the territory held by the regime. The term "reconciliation" is a misnomer, of course. The regime is interested in the surrender of the rebels, not rapprochement with them. But given the balance of forces and the slow progress, there seems to be a gap

between objective and method. In light of this,

"Terrorists," of course, is the regime's description of choice for rebel forces. But if foreign supporters of the insurgency decline to withdraw their support, as currently appears to be happening, how can the regime coerce them into doing so? Haidar did not appear to have any answers.

If this is the plan, it seems to be in an advanced state of execution. Syria, after all, is today divided into no less than seven enclaves: the territory controlled by the regime, three separate areas of rebel control, two Kurdish cantons, and the Islamic State area. What is the government's strategy to reverse this fragmentation, I ask? "We have absolute faith that this is a temporary situation," Tourjman replied. "[T]he major reason for this faith is that the Syrian people start to understand the conspiracy against them."

In other words, there is no strategy at all, but the kind of conspiracy theories that no self-respecting Baathist should be without. In fact, no evidence exists of any overarching plan to divide Syria — nor do any of the major forces in the country support its breakup. Syria's de facto division is a result of the inability of any force to prevail over all the others, not of design.

The reason for the regime's lack of knowledge is that decisions made by Assad and those around him will not be the decisive factor in determining Syria's future. As the fighting in eastern Aleppo showed, the government side only makes real progress when the Russians commit to ensuring its victory. So the crucial question is of Russian, not Syrian, intentions — and Moscow may well have already achieved most of what it came to Syria to achieve. It has ensured the safety of its bases in Latakia province and the survival of its regime allies, demonstrated the efficacy of Russian arms, and guaranteed there can be no diplomatic process to settle the war without Moscow's involvement.

The diplomacy emerging from ongoing peace talks in Astana, Kazakhstan, appears to suggest that Moscow is aiming to freeze the Syrian conflict more or less in place, followed by an ongoing political process. The formation of the four "de-escalation zones" looks set to leave the rebellion in control of large swaths of the country, while the upcoming assault on Raqqa by the SDF and the increasingly open U.S. commitment to this force raises the possibility of a U.S.-backed entity emerging east of the Euphrates.

With the regime and rebels now effectively reduced to client status and no great desire on the part of the patrons to commit to absolute victory for their proxies, the diplomacy on the Syrian war should presumably shift toward arrangements acknowledging the fragmentation of the country. Such arrangements would be built more or less around the status quo that will hold sway after the destruction of the Islamic State's holdings in eastern Syria. That is, Syria will be divided between the regime enclave in the west, the Sunni Arab rebels in the northwest and southwest, a Turkish-ensured rebel enclave in the north, an SDF-controlled region in the northeast, and some arrangement involving both the SDF and Western-backed Arab rebels in the east. As this process plays out, the Russians will continue to do as they wish by day and night in Damascus, the gap between regime rhetoric and reality will remain as gaping as ever, the rebels and the Kurds will continue to march in tune with their own patrons' wishes. Meanwhile, the stark fact will continue to remain unsaid: namely, that the state known as Syria has effectively ceased to exist.

## Saudi Creates New Military Industries Firm New Government-Owned Firm Aims to Become One of World's Top 25 Defense Companies by 2030, Boost Kingdom's Defense Production.

RIYADH - Saudi Arabia, is one of the world's biggest defense spenders. It is creating a new military industries firm as part of efforts to boost the kingdom's defense production.

American defense contractors are major suppliers of weapons to Saudi Arabia, which for more than two years, Saudi has led a coalition conducting air strikes and other operations against rebels in Yemen.

This will include maintenance and repair of fixed-wing aircraft, production of drones, and military vehicle repair and manufacture.

The company will also be involved with weapons and missiles, plus radars and other defense electronics.

It will contribute about \$3.7 billion to the kingdom's gross domestic product and invest more than \$1.6 billion in research and development by 2030, creating more than 40,000 jobs, PIF said.

Saudi Arabia's government says only about two percent of its security and defense spending is local, but that is targeted to reach 50 percent by 2030.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) said in an April report that Saudi Arabia last year was the world's fourth-largest military spender, at \$63.7 billion.

"SAMI will establish companies through joint ventures with global original equipment manufacturers, as well as cooperating with local military companies," the PIF said.

Among those local firms is Military Industries Corporation, a separate entity whose governor said in December that it would take "a few years" to cut the reliance on foreign arms.



Boosting local defence manufacturing is part of the Vision 2030 project to wean Saudi Arabia off oil revenue by expanding the industrial, business and investment base.

As part of the plan, the PIF aims to become the largest sovereign wealth fund in the world.

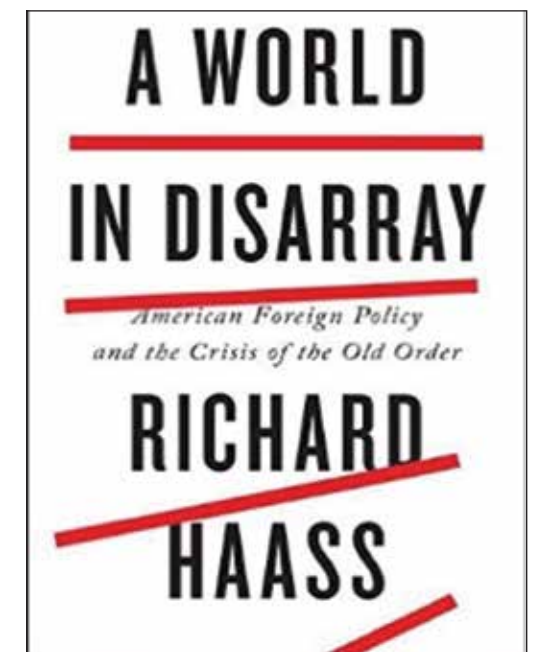
## A World in Disarray

### American Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Old Order

CFR President Richard N. Haass argues for an updated global operating system to address challenges from terrorism and the spread of nuclear weapons to climate change and cyberspace.

Book by Richard N. Haass

"These are no ordinary times. It will not be business as usual in a world of disarray; as a result, it cannot be foreign policy as usual," writes Richard Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations, in his latest book, *A World in Disarray: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Old Order*—a timely examination of a world increasingly defined by disorder. In three parts, the book contemplates the history of world order from the rise of the modern state system to the end of the Cold War; accounts for the momentous shifts in the last quarter century to shed light on the current state of affairs, and outlines specific steps to tackle the many challenges ahead. Haass argues that the fundamental elements of world order that have served the world well since World War II have largely run their course. The Middle East is unraveling. Asia is threatened by China's rise and a reckless North Korea. Europe, for decades the world's most stable region, is staggering under the weight of prolonged low economic growth, anger over immigration, and a rise in populism and nationalism. He writes that the election of Donald J. Trump and the unexpected vote for "Brexit" signal that many in modern democracies reject globalization and international involvement, including borders open to trade and immigrants as well as a willingness to maintain alliances and overseas commitments. Add to these concerns the threats of terrorism, the spread



of nuclear weapons, climate change, and cybersecurity,

He makes the case that the world needs a new operating system which he calls World Order 2.0 that reflects the reality that power is widely distributed and that borders count for less. One critical element of this adjustment will be adopting a new approach to sovereignty, one that embraces its obligations and responsibilities, as well as its rights and protections. Haass also details how the United States should act toward China and Russia, as well as in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Finally, he asserts that the United States needs to define national security more broadly, addressing what are normally thought of as domestic issues from dysfunctional politics to mounting debt as well as coming to an agreement on the nature of the United States' relationship with the rest of the world.

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