

Moving Past the Bosnia Fallacy New Models for Understanding Syria

BY BRIAN KREITLOW

“But [Syria] is not so much like Libya last year, where of course we had a successful intervention to save lives. [...] It is looking more like Bosnia in the 1990s, being on the edge of a sectarian conflict in which neighboring villages are attacking and killing each other so I don’t think we can rule anything out.” – British Foreign Secretary William Hague¹

“The way Syria is heading resembles the situation in Srebrenica.” – Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu²

As the slaughter in Syria rages on, it has become fashionable to look to Bosnia as an analogy for the violent conflict. Statements from foreign ministers, politicians and respected journalists highlight the similarities between the two conflicts. Headlines claim, “Syria Turning into Another Bosnia,” and “Syrian Conflict a Haunting Reminder of Bosnia,” though reading below the headlines on most articles reveals the true nature of the similarities between Bosnia and Syria. They are more circumstantial than substantive; the actual conflicts bear little similarity. In reality, the conflict in Syria is fundamentally different from Bosnia, making comparisons with Bosnia extremely misleading. Furthermore, prescriptions which call for the formation of enclaves, safe havens or statelets are based on an incomplete understanding of the conflict of Syria, and disregard many of the experiences of Bosnia – and other instances of ethnically based partition, for that matter. As Robert Jervis once noted: historical analogies “are rarely accurate and solutions based on false analogies can be devastating.”³ Policymakers and military strategists watching Syria would do well to read past the “sound bite” and embrace the lessons of other, more instructive situations, to help find appropriate approaches to the conflict in Syria.

This paper first seeks to expose the logical fallacy in attempting to make serious comparisons between the situations in Syria and Bosnia, by clearly identifying the major differences between the two conflicts. While Bosnia stemmed from a top-down maneuver

Lieutenant Colonel Brian Kreitlow is a Political-Military Officer at Headquarters, United States European Command.

instigated by a regime seeking to exploit ethnicity to achieve its political goals, Syria began as a bottom-up social revolution aimed at gaining greater freedoms. Despite some reporting to the contrary,⁴ Syria has remained generally free of the intense sectarian fighting that consumed Bosnia, precisely because the politicization of ethnicity has not (yet) become a useful tool.

Second, this paper presents three models for broadening our understanding of the situation in Syria: as a transition towards democracy from a “sultanistic” form of authoritarian rule; as a battleground for competing political ideologies; and as a proxy war between the West and Iran. Each of these models provides a different, complementary lens for evaluating the unfolding situation in Syria and helps us to build a more complete understanding of the crisis. Using models helps us to avoid the pitfalls of individual cases, and understanding what we are dealing with in Syria is a vital step to determining how we deal with Syria, both now and in a post-Assad environment.

As there is no international legal basis for intervention in Syria, this paper offers a handful of recommendations for U.S. policy in Syria. The key elements are; avoiding the politicization of ethnicity before, during and after the fall of Bashar al-Assad’s regime; opposing the creation of ethnic or confessionally-based states and starting the political dialogue between key actors now, to ease the pain of transition; speeding the formation of a relevant interim government; and improving the consolidation of democracy in a legitimate ruling body.

The war in Bosnia had its origins in the collapse of Yugoslavia – which is, notably, also very different from the collapse of Syria.

The crisis in Yugoslavia was primarily a crisis of government based on historical states and territories. Josip Tito’s model for Yugoslavia was based on the Soviet model, favoring full national self-determination for Yugoslav nationalities, while ensuring that the strong, centralized party organization served as the sole political expression of each nation’s will. This arrangement simultaneously strengthened ethnically derived states while ensuring that ethnicity was not politicized. Prior to the conflict, Bosnia was an ethnically diverse society and Muslims were generally well represented in the Bosnian government, though representation was skewed in favor of Serbs and Croats in both the Communist Party and Yugoslav federal government positions. Comprising only 15 percent of the 1981 Yugoslav population,⁵ Bosnian Muslims still retained a voice in the system, aided by Tito’s 1974 recognition of “Muslim” as a separate nationality, which opened up access to positions of influence. It was Slobodan Milošević’s advocacy of Serb nationalism that would politicize ethnicity in Yugoslavia and set the stage for the crises to come.

Milošević was a relative political newcomer in 1987 when he took up the flag of Serb nationalism. Vowing to protect the Serb populace from victimization in Kosovo, Croatia, and Bosnia, he incited ethnic Serbs throughout Yugoslavia by promising the support of the federal government and the Yugoslav National Army. Milošević’s goal was a very deliberate move to bring ethnic Serbs into a Serb state – a move underscored by the 1989 installation of his supporters into key positions in the leadership of Serbia’s two autonomous provinces (Vojvodina and Kosovo) and Montenegro.⁶

Kosovo and Montenegro each had votes in the Yugoslav national council, strengthening his influence in the federal government and triggering the failure of the government. This ultimately led to declarations of independence by Slovenia and Croatia, and an ill-fated referendum by the Bosnian Muslim leader Alija Izetbegović on an independent state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, precipitating the crisis often referred to as “Bosnia.”⁷ In the same manner as Croatia, Bosnia became a battleground for protecting and advancing the rights of the ethnic Serb population and its territory (and later for expanding Croat territories) – especially as it became clear that a solution would be based on ethnic partition. To cover his political maneuver, Milošević fed the West a steady stream of propaganda – that the conflict was an ethnic clash rooted in historic hatred – effectively presenting the conflict as one with no resolution.⁸ Instead, it was a modern concoction which politicized ethnic differences in order to advance an agenda which served one ethnic group at the expense of others. In short, tensions between ethnic groups in Bosnia were the result, not the cause of the war in Yugoslavia.⁹

In contrast to the top-down political maneuver that instigated the conflict in Bosnia, the Syrian conflict sprung up from the local level. The Syrian uprising began in Deraa, in southern Syria, when locals demanded the release of 14 schoolchildren arrested for graffiti-ing a popular Arab Spring slogan: “The people want the downfall of the regime.”¹⁰ Five protesters were subsequently shot by security forces over the next two days, triggering more protests. The original protestors are likely to have

been Sunni, but their outrage had little to do with religion or religious differences and more to do with restricted social and economic privileges, corruption and the 43 years of emergency rule.

When al-Assad cracked down on the protests, an anti-regime insurgency erupted, with over 1,000 deaths in the first few months. The spiral of violence has continued and expanded from there. The al-Assad government promised token reforms in 2012, but the elections were boycotted by the opposition, cementing their position that al-Assad’s removal from power is their primary goal.

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Despite the huge divide between the privileged Alawite leadership and the Sunni masses, the conflict in Syria has remained remarkably non-sectarian – in large part due to the Ba’ath Party’s ideology of secular nationalism, which has guided the regime for over fifty years. Alawites rely on this secular nationalism, because they would be marginalized in a Sunni-dominated state which combines political and religious ideologies. The Ba’ath Party’s nationalist ideology allowed for a secular, if autocratic government, and provided an opportunity for both minority Alawites and some Sunnis to rise to prominent government positions.

Former Syrian Minister of Defense Mustafa Tlas (Sunni) served as Syria’s minister of defense for over 30 years; his son, Manaf, was a general in Syria’s Republican Guard until his defection in 2012. Recently slain Sunni cleric Sheikh Mohammed

al-Bouti was also a fervent and long-standing supporter of the al-Assad regime. The effective result of this strategy is a focus on crushing political dissent rather than religious groups. Hafez al-Assad's infamous 1982 massacre in Hama did not specifically target Sunni Muslims per se; rather it was to blunt an anti-government insurgency by the Ba'ath Party's long-standing political and ideological rival, the Muslim Brotherhood. The growing presence of the Muslim Brotherhood, and other more extremist Islamist groups (such as the al-Qaida-linked al-Nusrah Front) in the Syrian opposition poses ideological and political challenges to the regime every bit as much as it introduces sectarian elements into the conflict. While there is an apparent trend towards "sectarian" violence, it is not overtly clear that the

motive is due to religious, rather than political, differences – as fine of a line as that may be.¹¹ Eliminating challengers to the regime (and their supporters) belies an agenda in which ethnicity and religion take a back seat to domestic politics and clearly differentiates these atrocities from those perpetrated in Bosnia in the 1990s.

After only a quick review, it is readily apparent that there are few actual similarities between Bosnia and Syria. Nonetheless, following on popular comparisons between Syria and Bosnia, the logical next step has been to advance solutions for Syria based on perceived "successes" in Bosnia. A 2012 editorial in the Wall Street Journal offered: "A Bosnia-style air campaign targeting elite Syrian military units could prompt the General Staff to reconsider its contempt for



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Brian Schunböhmer

President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, President Alija Izetbegovic of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and President Franjo Tudjman of the Republic of Croatia initial the Dayton Peace Accords

international opinion, and perhaps its allegiance to the Assad family. Short of that, carving out some kind of safe haven inside Syria would at least save lives.”¹² These prescriptions are fraught with danger, and not only show a lack of understanding of the differences between the two conflicts, but also a lack of understanding of how these strategies “worked” in Bosnia. Most of the solutions proposed to end the conflict in Bosnia failed – even the Dayton Accords have only had limited success in solving the core problems. Where the Dayton Accords succeeded was in implementing a cease-fire – in part by creating two separate sub-states along ethnic lines. These partitions limited the justification for further interethnic conflict and generally served to protect the individuals in each sub-state. In the longer term, though, these features have proven unsustainable and have left behind a permanently crippled country incapable of self-governance.

Introducing partitions in Syria based on ethnic or confessional difference neither resolves nor addresses the core issues of the conflict. Bashar al-Assad has been fighting to maintain his power against an insurgency – ceding territory to the insurgents is an unacceptable solution. Additionally, since the battle is for rightful ownership of the state of Syria and not for protection of ethnic groups, the creation of a rump sub-state led by al-Assad would be tenuous and prolong the conflict. Establishing ethnically based enclaves or sub-states in Syria is likely to produce one of two results: ethnic cleansing to consolidate power; or the introduction of constant ethnic tensions.

Professor Milton Esman notes that the creation of sub-states does not eliminate

ethnic conflicts, as “successor states become new venues for the pursuit and the regulation of conflicting ethnic claims” through both civil and violent means.¹³ At the same time, federations of co-existing ethnic communities, in which collectivities are incorporated through consocietal or power-sharing arrangements (as in Bosnia) have repeatedly failed.¹⁴ In short, ethnic partition in Syria trends toward creating a situation like Bosnia.

Safe havens in Bosnia were poorly defined and poorly enacted, and as a result, generally unsuccessful (Srebrenica was a United Nations-designated safe haven). Most UN bodies and Security Council members did not support the idea of safe havens – safe havens were to be employed only as a last resort – and member nations were not willing to provide the appropriate level of protection to make the safe havens work.¹⁵

Bosnia does, however, offer some useful lessons on the idea of safe havens. First, safe havens must be clearly defined; the international commitment to protecting them must be made clear to both the protected and the aggressors. Second, they need to be defensible and established in a manner that allows for protection of the civilian populace. Massive, inter-confessional cities such as Homs and Hama, situated along main lines of communication are simply not defensible as safe havens. Third, safe havens meant to protect civilians cannot be used as a base for insurgent operations. Doing so removes the impartiality that underpins the sanctity of the safe haven. Fourth, sufficient forces must be in place on the ground to protect the zone and they must not be seen as combatants in their own right. Finally, any forces charged with securing

safe-havens must be granted sufficiently robust rules of engagement (ROE) to protect the area – ROE that UN personnel lacked in Bosnia.

“We need to not lose sight of the fact that this was a populist uprising – to uproot a dictatorial regime – that was faced with the utmost brutality and Bashar al-Assad seems like not giving up, however, we’re not giving up either on our rights to transform Syria into a democratic, civil state.”
– Yaser Tabbara, legal advisor for the Syrian National Coalition¹⁶

One way to view the conflict in Syria is through the lens of scholarship on democratic transitions. Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, who chronicled transitions to democracies throughout Latin America and Eastern Europe, identified five different model types of modern regimes.¹⁷ Based on the models they offered, Syria would be most-likely categorized as a “sultanistic” regime, “where the private and public are fused, there is a strong tendency toward familial power and dynastic succession, there is no distinction between a state career and personal service to the ruler, there is a lack of rationalized impersonal ideology, economic success depends on a personal relationship to the ruler, and, most of all, the ruler acts only according to his own unchecked discretion, with no larger impersonal goals.”¹⁸ This label is often applied to Slobodan Milošević as well as Nicolae Ceaușescu, Saddam Hussein, Moammar Gaddafi, and North Korean rulers since Kim Il-Sung. It is no surprise that the course of events in Syria rings eerily similar to Romania in 1989 and Libya in 2011, though Saddam Hussein’s sultanistic regime in Iraq

offers the best mirror of Syria in terms of religion, ethnicity and political distribution.

In April 2013, Linz and Stepan evaluated the Arab countries and their forms of government, noting that none is truly sultanistic and instead introducing a “continuum of sultanism.”¹⁹ While Gaddafi receives their billing for the most sultanistic of the Arab Spring leaders (al-Assad, Mubarak, and Ben Ali round out the group), they note that the al-Assad regime has strong sultanistic features, consistent with those identified above.²⁰ There is (or has been) some internal autonomy in the Syrian business community and state apparatus, though this does not extend to the rigidly controlled Syrian military. Regardless of the degree of sultanism, the resultant political conditions created by the extreme nature of this regime type remain consistent with the original sultanistic model. Lacking political moderates and soft-liners within the regime, democratic transitions from sultanistic regimes do not usually occur through negotiations with the opposition, nor by the leader stepping down—they often end only with the death of the leader through armed revolt, as readily witnessed in Romania, Libya, and Iraq. The precarious position of the Alawite minority in Syria heightens the regime’s resistance to a negotiated solution, achieving the same effective result as a truly sultanistic regime.

The categorization of Syria as a sultanistic regime in transition has two key implications: first, it clarifies that Syria is not a complex and intractable interethnic conflict – it is a revolution seeking control of the state. Second, it gives us a more constructive model for analyzing the situation and understanding what comes next. Linz and

Stepan note the tendency for non-democratic regimes to follow the collapse of sultanistic regimes, and prescribe, “The best chance for democratic transition is if revolutionary upheaval is led by internationally supported, democratically inclined leaders who set a date for elections and allow free contestation of power.”²¹ The evolution of the conflict, however, challenges the focused application of this model. The range of potential motives amongst actors in the Syrian opposition sets the stage for a battle for influence during the transition time frame, potentially “hijacking” the revolution.

Conditions are ripe for a stolen revolution specifically when there is no central driving force or ideology behind the revolution. The revolutions in Romania and across Yugoslavia (1989) were spontaneous, but the style of government had not allowed for the formation of an organized political opposition necessary to push through the reforms the protestors sought. In each case, a motivated social or government actor was able to seize the controls and guide the revolution towards meeting its own needs. In Romania, this was Ion Iliescu, who stepped in to lead the movement and consolidate power, though his supporters were primarily regime officials.²² Similarly, the 1989 anti-government protests in the Yugoslav republic of Montenegro did not advance a particular political actor to replace the government. Instead, Milo Đukanović and Momir Bulatović (members of the regime) crossed over to the opposition and then negotiated their new positions as Prime Minister and President, respectively.²³ Similar circumstances existed in Egypt and in Libya, where the authoritarian political rule did not allow

for the formation of any significant organized opposition. Political opposition was not allowed, and threats to the regime were harshly dealt with. It would not be unfair to suggest the Egyptian Supreme Council of the Armed Forces effectively “stole” the Egyptian revolution in 2011, as it intervened between the protestors and the collapsing regime to protect its interests and shape the post-Mubarak political scene.²⁴ Iraq never experienced a revolution, but the U.S. invasion triggered the same result – a power vacuum with no clear mobilized political movements.

Syria shows these same symptoms, as the lack of opposition movements has opened the door for motivated actors to seize control of the revolution. Foremost among these actors are the Muslim Brotherhood, various al-Qaida affiliated groups, and the people in the Syrian National Coalition, all of whom are jockeying for position in a post-Assad Syria. The Syrian populace has long been disengaged from political dialogue, in part because there has been no room for dissent with the regime – a belief reinforced by the 1982 Homs massacre and the government’s harsh response to the initial protests in Deraa. After more than two years of war, much of the original revolution seems to have died out, leaving these armed groups to carry on the fight against the regime.

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The primary opposition to the ruling Ba’ath Party has been its long-time ideological rival, the Muslim Brotherhood, which

Hafez al-Assad ordered into exile in 1980, following an assassination attempt against him. Today, it is the largest and most organized bloc of the otherwise fragmented Syrian National Coalition. The Brotherhood's public statements evince a commitment to a democratic social order, though its motives remain suspect. The Muslim Brotherhood's March 2012 Covenant and Pact called for the "institution of a State that respects human rights as enshrined by divine texts and international instruments, such as dignity, equality, freedom of thought and speech; [a state] where no citizen's beliefs or religion shall be subject to prejudice."²⁵ This should sound familiar – it is nearly identical to Mohamed Morsi's pre-electoral pledges of inclusiveness in Egypt.²⁶ This messaging gave Morsi the political support and international backing to take power – specifically when contrasted against the unrestrained radicalism of the opposing Salafists. Messaging aside, the Muslim Brotherhood likely believes that democracy is a useful tool in Syria, sensing that a democratic election would result in a victory for it, as happened in Egypt.

The prominent role of the Muslim Brotherhood should not, however, be misconstrued as introducing a sectarian component to the conflict; instead, it introduces an important ideological and political component to the dispute. The recent assassination of Mohamed Saeed al-Bouti, the prominent pro-regime Sunni cleric, highlights the importance of politics over religion. The Sunni cleric was a strong supporter of Bashar al-Assad and his father Hafez al-Assad (both Alawite). In supporting their Ba'athist policies, he was known for actively speaking out against the Muslim

Brotherhood. As the Brotherhood gains strength in the opposition, it is likely that members of the movement will seek to expand their political agenda against others, meaning that the victims of anti-regime violence will not only be Alawites or Shi'a, but will include Sunnis and Christians opposed to the Muslim Brotherhood. This ideological dispute should also be borne in mind as a new post-Assad government seeks to form. A dominant Muslim Brotherhood could, as in Egypt, seize the revolution from the hands of secular nationalists and deliver them into the clutches of a competing vision of Syria's future that is no more democratic than the last forty years have been.²⁷

"We most definitely have a proxy war in Syria. At this point of the conflict it is difficult not to say that the international dimension of the Syrian conflict precedes the domestic one." – Ayham Kamel, Eurasia Group²⁸

Threats to transitions do not only come from within. Weak states and states in revolution become battlegrounds for foreign actors seeking to affect the shape of the new state, and Syria is no exception. To a much greater extent than Bosnia, Syria is showing signs as a proxy battlefield for influence between regional power brokers – or more directly, between the Gulf States and Iran. While Western actors are getting much of the attention, there are a number of other actors whose motives deserve to be addressed. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the Gulf States are heavily supporting the Syrian opposition. These countries are driving support to the opposition, focused on curbing growing Iranian influence in the Gulf and

Middle East, and establishing a friendly government in Syria. The Arab League has recognized the Syrian National Coalition for Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as the legitimate government of Syria, and the Coalition's then-president, Sheikh Moaz al-Khatib, attended the League's March meeting in Qatar. Iran is providing political and material support to the Syrian regime, both directly and via Lebanese Hezbollah. According to Syrian opposition leaders "Iran has dispatched hundreds of advisers, security officials and intelligence operatives to Syria, along with weapons, money and electronic surveillance equipment."²⁹ This support is to ensure that the Alawite regime, a key Iranian ally, remains in power. The loss of the Syrian government would deal a significant blow to Iranian regional aspirations, including the export of its own Islamic revolution. Russia and China, with their own interests in mind, support the Syrian regime in international politics, preventing UN Security Council resolutions that would condemn al-Assad in any way.

The inherent danger of a proxy war is

that the conflict is restrained only by the limitations of the conflicting parties. In this case, neither Iran nor the West or Gulf States seem overly constrained in the resources they are able to provide to support the regime. This means that Syria will face continued destruction—the citizens and the fighters will never reach a breaking point, for they are now only the venue and the pawns in a larger conflict. At the same time, the proxy war can change not only the nature of the war, but also the constitution of its primary actors. Factions become more or less powerful or coherent often because of foreign incentives, which change the course of eventual compromise within a country.

The point of this paper is not to label Syria as an example of one of these individual models, but rather to give a greater and more accurate understanding of the dynamics at work. Each of the models represents a part of the overall situation, and the Syrian civil war is a mixture of all three variants. Each of the proposed models represents a body of theory and discussion, and



(Syrian National Coalition)

Historic photo of National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces members in Doha, Qatar, 18 November 2012.

each has its own formulations, expectations and prescribed actions. Just as importantly, these models do not prescribe a clear path for external actors to successfully intervene in a domestic transition. Libya and Iraq do not provide ideal or convincing scenarios for an international presence; Romania,

Thus far, the United States has generally taken the right steps – identifying the Nusra Front as a terrorist group, pressing the Syrian opposition to support democratic and inclusive ideals, working to shut down Iranian shipments to the Syrian regime – though all with mixed results.

Tunisia, Egypt, Serbia (2000) were decided from within. In the absence of direct action, the most effective steps the United States and its allies can take are ones designed to prevent the politicization of ethnicity or religion, strengthen the organization of the opposition, and help produce international consensus on a way ahead.

The primary goal of the U.S. and international community must be preventing the politicization of ethnicity throughout the transition. This is certainly easier said than done – especially as neither the United States nor the international community have any role or meaningful presence inside Syria. Instead, efforts must focus on engaging the Syrian National Coalition, the Free Syrian Army and external actors who are involved in the conflict. The effort to prevent the politicization of ethnicity must focus on maintaining a secular, democratic opposition prior to and throughout the transition, while maintaining the territorial integrity of

the state.

Should the various opposition forces manage to succeed in overcoming the regime, the disparate goals of the various opposition factions will become more pronounced, raising the likelihood for greater violence, along political, ideological and confessional lines. In part, this will result from the newfound availability of power, money and benefits as parties look to exploit the vacuum left by the receding state. Greed and traditional loyalties to families, tribes, and more tangible communities will supersede the commitment to the revolution and the vague idea of a Syrian state. These changes open the door for the politicization of religious differences as budding politicians scramble to mobilize support and build power and influence. Retribution against Alawite or Shi'a regime figures is a likely part of this – though it may be difficult to determine if the cause is sectarian or simply anti-regime retribution.

The United States should work to prevent politicization of ethnicity or religion prior to the transition. Thus far, the United States has generally taken the right steps – identifying the Nusra Front as a terrorist group, pressing the Syrian opposition to support democratic and inclusive ideals, working to shut down Iranian shipments to the Syrian regime – though all with mixed results. The Syrian National Coalition has repeatedly selected broad-based ethnic minorities and secular figures for its leadership, such as former Prime Minister, Ghassan Hitto, who was selected over the three candidates fielded by the Muslim Brotherhood. Many of the former Syrian National Coalition Presidents, such as George Sabra and Moaz al-Khitab, are

known for their secular political views.

Unfortunately, the Syrian National Coalition has been anything but stable and has little legitimacy inside of Syria. The only real body in the opposition that has legitimacy is the Muslim Brotherhood due to its history of opposition to the Syrian regime. Its philosophical background and endurance give it a legitimacy that other factions do not have, and (as in Egypt) by presenting a middle ground between radical Islamist parties and secular democratic parties it gains command of the electorate. To this point, the Muslim Brotherhood has wielded its considerable influence to exploit the transitional period to its advantage. U.S. Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford, in a meeting with the Syrian National Council in June 2012, made American support contingent upon implementation of reforms recommended by an independent committee.³⁰ The committee's recommendations, which were eventually signed by most of the opposition forces, struck at the Brotherhood's monopoly on power by outlining the transitional period, detailing the disposition of armed factions and criminalizing the use of money to buy political loyalty. Despite international opposition, the Muslim Brotherhood succeeded in staving off a follow-up committee and excluding the plan from the Syrian National Coalition's November 2012 founding statements. The United States cannot fight this battle alone – it needs to press the Arab League and other western donors to hold to its standards in ensuring the Syrian National Coalition holds to agreed principles in exchange for international support.

As discussed previously, the United States should oppose the creation of ethnic or confessional-based sub-states in Syria.

The formation of ethnic states, such as an Alawite state in the West, a Kurdish state in the northeast and a Druze state along the Jordanian border would be unsustainable and unacceptable to other states in the region. At best, the creation of ethnically or confessional-based mini-states in Syria could undermine U.S. efforts to promote a tolerant, representative and multi-confessional state in Iraq, as well as in Lebanon and Jordan. At worst, breakaway sub-states could lead to redrawing the entire map of the Middle East. While this is probably a much-needed step towards resolving the larger regional problems, it undermines the integrity of the international system if it is not a deliberate process undertaken by sovereign states. The only way to prevent a disastrous overhaul of the region is to further the mythical state which is Syria, and by ensuring that minority groups understand that they will have a voice in a future government.

Even if territorial partition is avoided, the new government will become a venue for competition between political actors, and ethnicity is a proven tool for mobilizing and consolidating support. The United States should not support the enshrinement of ethnic, religious or confessional-based differences in a post-Assad government. Rather than leveling representation, the allocation of government positions by ethnicity or religion (e.g., Iraq under the Coalition Provisional Authority or Lebanon under the National Pact) has been historically proven to increase the likelihood of sectarian conflict. While ethnic political parties are not inherently dangerous or violent (their ultimate goal is to advance the goals of their ethnic / religious group); they indirectly (or

sometimes directly) threaten those outside of their group. Special electoral processes or arrangements that ensure diversity in government may alleviate the overt domination of one social group, but negatively impact the quality of the resultant democracy.

As a final step, the United States should encourage political dialogue on the future of Syria now. The transition to democracy will be very complicated and will take time, especially given the absence of political life under al-Assad. Now is the time for political discussion between the Muslim Brotherhood and secular members of the opposition on the future relationship between state and religions, the nature of the transitional government, amnesty for former regime and Ba'ath Party members (and the status of the Ba'ath Party), and on the desired functions of the new government. Waiting to begin these discussions until al-Assad falls (or even months later as was the case in Egypt) delays the development of political society and the consolidation of a democratic alternative to authoritarian rule.

Rather than pinning our Syrian forecasts on naïve comparisons with select historical examples, looking to different models provides a rich and diverse backdrop for examining the multiple layers of the Syrian conflict. These models provide us with more relevant examples on the role of ideology, ethnicity and foreign involvement, which are essential ingredients of the current situation. This analysis has also underscored the very important role of the Muslim Brotherhood in “hijacking” the revolution, a continuing development that will have long-lasting impacts on the future of the revolution and the transition to a post-Assad regime. There is no clear way for the United

States to control or confront these developments, though efforts to require the Syrian National Coalition to undergo review by an independent committee are a step in the right direction. The United States must continue to push for such efforts which allow the international community to maintain a hand in the oversight of the transition, and to ensure the formation of a democratic and inclusive government. These conditions must become prerequisites for the delivery of aid and assistance, not only from the West, but also from the Gulf States and other international actors.

Syria is not Bosnia, nor is it necessarily Iraq, Egypt or Lebanon. It is not a foregone conclusion that Syria's day of sectarian infighting is here, or that it is even coming. To help prevent that scenario, the international community must use its leverage to avoid the mobilization of ethnic groups for political purposes, the division of territory based on ethnic or religious identification, and the constitutional enshrinement of consocietal arrangements. Rather than solving problems, these “solutions” only create fresh avenues for conflict, setting the stage for Syria to become another Bosnia or Iraq. Only by understanding and addressing the problem at hand, can we stop solving past problems and focus on preventing their recurrence. **PRISM**

NOTES

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¹⁷ Linz, Juan and Alfred Stepan. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1996), p. 44. The five types of modern regimes they identified are: Democracy, Authoritarianism, Totalitarianism, Post-Totalitarianism and Sultanism.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁹ Linz Juan and Alfred Stepan. "Democratization Theory and the 'Arab Spring'", *Journal of Democracy* 24:2, April 2013, p. 26.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²¹ Linz and Stepan 1996, p. 58

²² Darmanović, Srđan. "Demokratske Tranzicije u Južnoj i Istočnoj Evropi," *Doktorska Disertacija*. (Podgorica: Univerzitet Crne Gore, 2002), pp. 166-167.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 185-187.

²⁴ Dobson, William J. *The Dictator's Learning Curve*. (New York: Doubleday, 2012), pp. 209, 211-212.

²⁵ Carnegie Middle East Center. "The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria" <http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=48370>

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