Syria in 2013

Preparing for persistent turmoil?

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Introduction

The current crisis in Syria has already lasted 18 months. It goes without saying that the future course of the conflict and the country cannot possibly be predicted. However, in order to prepare for what lies ahead, it is helpful to collect thoughts on the possible short-term and long-term developments of the conflict by identifying various potential scenarios. Such an exercise is a useful instrument to constructively explore different possible futures and realities in a given context, in order to support robust policy planning.

This paper describes three scenarios for the future of Syria in 2013. Based on the length of the Syrian crisis, the absence of a determined international response to the conflict thus far, and the current inability of the fighting parties to enforce a decisive breakthrough, this time horizon appeared to be the most meaningful. Although the focus is on Syria, some attention is given to developments in the broader Middle East. For each scenario, policy instruments that could be applied by the international community are described (including diplomacy, development assistance and defense). The conclusions include an analysis of the policy instruments that will be useful in every scenario and therefore should be prepared (figure 2); the policy instruments that will be important in some scenarios and therefore should at least be considered (figure 2); and the policy instruments that are useful to implement in order to steer towards a more positive outcome.

This scenario exercise builds on three brainstorm sessions, which were held with a group of representatives of the Netherlands Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense, and experts on Syria. These meetings served to share insights on the current situation and discuss expectations about the future development of the conflict. Subsequently, a number of meetings were held with a smaller group to work out and develop scenarios. Along the lines of what was discussed in the meetings, and based on analysis of the latest developments in the Syrian (and the international) context, three scenarios were identified:
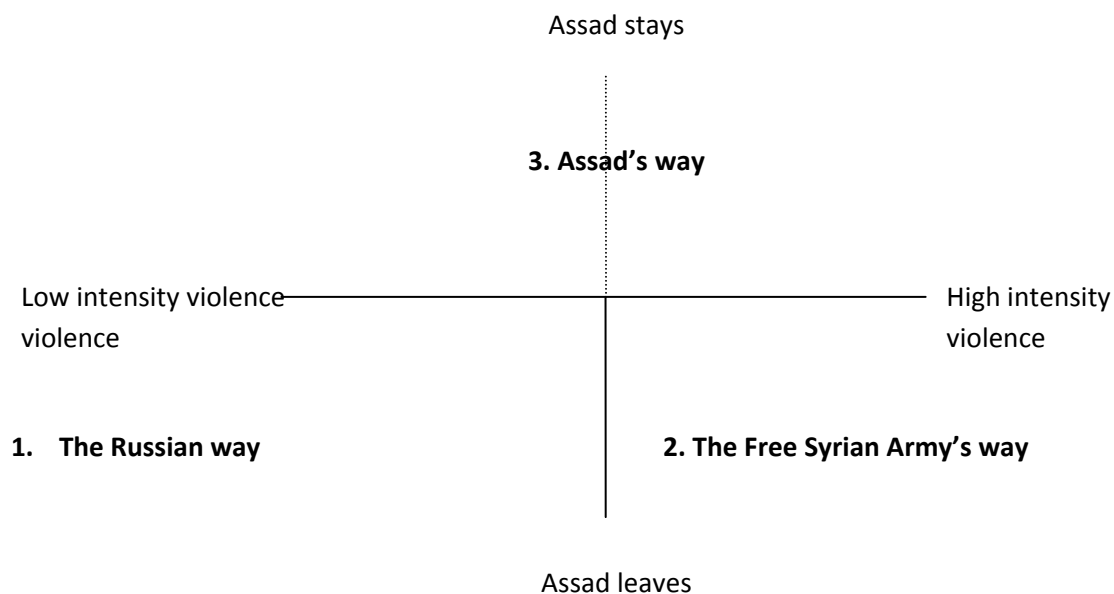
1) **The Russian way: a political solution including the departure of Assad**

2) **The Free Syrian Army's way: a limited international military intervention resulting in the ousting of Assad**

3) **Assad's way: survival of the Assad regime**

These scenarios have been selected to cover the widest range of scenarios in order to enable a broad 360˚ view of possible Syrian futures and, as such, to support the development of robust policy options. The choice of these scenarios is made on the basis of an axis grid of two key-uncertainties following the Shell methodology of scenario building. The two key-uncertainties identified in the Syrian context are: 1) Will president Bashar al-Assad stay in power, yes or no?; and 2) Will the future intensity of the conflict be high, or low? Both questions are still high on the Syrian and international agendas and will be crucial in determining the policy instruments to be implemented by the

international community. Usually, on the basis of two key-uncertainties, four scenarios are developed. Two of these would imply a departure of Assad, one in a high intensity conflict context, and one in a less violent environment. Additionally, two scenarios would reckon with the survival of his regime. As these latter two scenarios in their description and effects would be relatively similar, it has been decided to describe these as one single scenario, resulting in the three scenarios mentioned above. It is important to underline that, based on the ongoing armament of rebels and the proliferation of militias and fighting groups, each scenario including the low intensity conflict scenarios, assumes that violence will persist but that the intensity and type of violence varies. The relation between each of the scenarios and the two key-uncertainties is illustrated in the axis grid below.

Figure 1: Axis grid "Syria 2013 – Preparing for persistent turmoil?"

Assad stays

3. **Assad's way**

Low intensity violence   High intensity
violence   violence

1.   **The Russian way**   **2. The Free Syrian Army's way**

Assad leaves

Each description of the scenarios below starts with a paragraph on the current context from which important scenario traits have been extrapolated into the future. These contexts are written in italics. The fictive parts of the scenarios describe what the future of Syria may look like in 2013. These passages have been written in block-roman font. Subsequently, the description of each scenario ends with the policy instruments that would be required in that scenario.

SCENARIO 1: The Russian way

Context

The spiraling violence in Syria, due to the conduct of both the Assad regime and the armed opposition groups, has prevented the United Nations/Arab League (UN/AL) roadmap to peace from coming into effect. Kofi Annan resigned as the special envoy to Syria, stating that the "increasing militarization" of the conflict and the "lack of unity" within the UN made it impossible to carry out his task. Annan's replacement, high-profile international diplomat Lakhdar Brahmin, has been welcomed by the international community. Brahimi expressed his determination to bring an end to the conflict and, in that context, has stated that the departure of Assad is not the starting point of his work. For security reasons, the mandate of the UN military observer mission has not been renewed.

Scenario

As the Syrian crisis enters its third year, it becomes evident that the conflict has turned into a lengthy war of attrition, in which none of the fighting parties is able to attain victory. Reports on atrocities committed by armed groups are numerous, and the total number of refugees has far exceeded 500,000. The Assad regime's control over the country has declined dramatically and, in response, the regime has transformed into a factional militia with little incentive to compromise.

The realization that Assad's regime has indefinitely lost its grip and ability to govern the country gradually sinks in for Assad's long-time ally, Russia. Anxious about losing a strategic partner regime in the Arab region, Moscow decides to initiate a renewed diplomatic attempt to end the crisis and to prepare for a Syria without Bashar al-Assad. The shift in Russia's position gives new impulse to the diplomatic process led by UN special envoy Brahimi.

Under the auspices of Russia, Brahimi invites not only the US and the EU, but also all regional players – Turkey, the Arab Gulf states and Iran, as well as representatives of the Syrian opposition and the Syrian government – to the negotiation table. The plan is met by international reluctance and negotiations take months. Eventually, agreement is reached on the departure of Bashar al-Assad, providing that existing regime institutions stay in place and current state officials are offered a place in the transition. Russia fulfills the crucial role of pressuring Assad to leave the stage and guaranteeing the agreement, while it provides Bashar al-Assad and his family with a way out and a possibility to build a new luxurious existence in Venezuela.

Under the Russian-brokered and internationally supported peace deal, the rights of the Alawite minority and other (Christian) minorities are safeguarded, the safety and economic interests of the Assad family are ensured, and the family enjoys immunity from prosecution. To Syrian opposition groups, both inside Syria and abroad, the peace deal offers a political road map to ensure their coming to power and their political integration in state structures, as well as the reform of these

structures into democratic institutions. The interests of the Kurdish community are also represented in the agreement. The political process is coupled with long-term assistance and support by the international community, covering a wide range of actions to prevent the undermining of the political process. First on the agenda of Syria's transition is the reform of the state's security sector. Members of the ruling elite are removed from key positions in the security apparatus and replaced by respected (opposition) figures. The Free Syrian Army is integrated into the state's security apparatus. Other mid-term international post-conflict assistance programs focus on the promotion of civilian governance and civilian police (Rule of Law), border control, the start-up of a democratic process (elections), among other issues. Longer term assistance programs include truth and reconciliation programs to resolve societal issues directly resulting from the conflict.

Despite far-reaching promises to the Alawite minority, some elements of this community do not easily accept the new government out of fear of a Sunni take-over and in an attempt to cling to their position in the face of an uncertain future. Some militias loyal to the Assad family, as well as newly militarized militias fearful of the fate of the Alawite community, continue their violent resistance after the departure of Assad, receiving covert support from Iran. Moreover, although the provisions of the roadmap prevent the eruption of large-scale sectarian violence, the fragmented nature of the opposition and the presence of Al-Qa'ida affiliated armed groups accounts for a continuation of a (lower) level of violence. Also, retaliatory violence remains a significant societal issue.

As an end to the violence is crucial to the success of the political agreement, commitment from the international community to reach stability is perceived as key. The Arab Gulf states agree to cease the arming and financing of armed groups inside Syria. Furthermore, as the political process is geared towards a post-Assad polity that reflects the composition of Syrian society, all stakeholders – particularly regional players – prevent the monopolization of important state institutions by one societal group. Additionally, the achievement of a political solution and the implementation of a transitional road map both significantly decrease the destabilizing effect the Syrian conflict has on the region.

Policy options for the international community in this scenario:

- Work towards achieving unity between opposition groups inside and outside Syria, to ensure an inclusive post-Assad polity and to keep spoilers from obstructing the transition. Also, clear agreements with Syria's new leadership on the protection of *all* civilians and human rights is key;
- Closely monitor regional developments that could have a "backlashing" effect on the Syrian crisis, and if requested, provide (military) assistance to Syria's neighboring countries (Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq) in an effort to prevent spill-over and the emergence of spoilers;
- Prevent regional and international sponsoring of jihadist elements of the Syrian opposition, by applying diplomatic pressure where needed;
- Focus international attention on the biological and chemical weapon stocks in Syria, in particular the control over these weapons and consider their removal in a UN mandated military operation;

- Participate in a UN peacekeeping mission in Syria, directly following the departure of Bashar al-Assad, aimed at establishing and protecting the parameters for a successful transition;
- Provide durable support for institutional reform to make Syria's state structures adaptable to a post-Assad political reality;
- Provide assistance in Security Sector Reform (SSR), including the civilian police, border control and the demobilization of remaining militias (DDR);
- Provide full support for the democratization process (including elections) as a part of the political road map;
- Provide support to the rule of law and the promotion of good governance;
- Offer assistance for the recovery of Syria's economy in the post-conflict phase;
- Provide assistance to Syria's neighboring countries as they work to return refugees to Syria;
- Continue the provision of humanitarian assistance to victims of the violence, internally displaced, and refugees in neighboring countries;
- In the long(er) term, assist in efforts to start a truth and reconciliation process;
- Within the framework of the UN, work towards the lifting of sanctions against Syria's regime, in particular sanctions that affect the delivery of basic goods and services to the population.

SCENARIO 2: The Free Syrian Army's way

Context

The numerous reports of violence against Syrian civilians, coupled with the inability of the UN/AL to enforce a breakthrough in the conflict thus far, has gravely undermined the viability of a political solution, and has resulted in growing calls for a military intervention by the international community. Nevertheless, a resolution authorizing the use of force to topple the Assad regime continues to be blocked by Russia, China and other non-interventionist states in the UNSC, ruling out the option of military intervention under auspices of the UN. Even the countries in favor of Assad's departure have questioned a robust military intervention, fearing a regional spill-over of the conflict. However, US President Obama stated that the use or movement of chemical and biological weapons by the Assad regime could be a reason to initiate military action. Moreover, the Syrian opposition continuously requests the establishment of a no-fly zone over Syria and safe havens patrolled by foreign forces near the borders with Jordan and Turkey. They argue these should counter the Syrian regime's air superiority and reduce its attacks against civilian targets. According to Abdel Basset Sida, Head of the Syrian National Council, the regime's increasing use of air power in particular is hindering the opposition's advances in the country.

Scenario

More than a year after the Syrian military's first air strikes, it is evident that the regime continuously uses its air power not only to attack rebel forces, but civilian targets as well. International outcry follows after an air attack wiping out an entire village, killing nearly all inhabitants including many women and children. In the context of heavy fighting and ongoing bloodshed, the mission of UN special envoy Brahimi ends after months of failed talks and negotiations, bringing the diplomatic process to a halt.

The atrocities committed by the regime, the absence of a new diplomatic initiative and the internationally-felt fear of the use of chemical weapons by the regime, all lead to a US-Turkish decision for a limited military intervention. The establishment of a no-fly zone, it is argued, primarily serves a humanitarian purpose (protection of Syrian civilians under R2P). A secondary goal is that it strengthens the position of the Free Syrian Army. Both countries convince other NATO allies to participate in the establishment of the no-fly zone. These countries agree despite their initial hesitance to repeat the "Libya approach", all the more so because this time a UNSC mandate is lacking in view of veto's by Russia and China. Arab allies, including Jordan and the Arab Gulf states join the coalition.

Indeed, the no-fly zone hastens the Free Syrian Army's (FSA) advances and weakens the regime's ability to strike back. Over several months, back-and-forth fighting prevails in which the FSA manages

to capture several strategic positions, which are sometimes re-captured by the government. However, slowly the FSA advances, boosted by covert foreign military assistance from a number of NATO allies on the ground, eventually resulting in the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad. Nonetheless, the assumption that his ousting would bring an end to the violence proves to be ill-founded. Numerous (newly established) militias, including Al-Qa'ida affiliated and Kurdish groups, but also groups loyal to the former regime, such as the *shabiha*, make use of the immediate post-Assad chaos to pursue their interests. A high level of sectarian violence continues and retaliation – particularly aimed against the Alawite community – remains an important societal issue jeopardizing a stable post-Assad polity.

Moreover, the military action by the coalition of the willing without the mandate of the UNSC and clearly against the will of Russia and China, has profound consequences at the international level. The decision by NATO member states to ignore the objections that followed the Libya intervention and the vetoes in the lead up to the operation against the Syrian regime, further paralyzes the UNSC. The consequences of this widened gap between the West and its allies, and Russia and China, goes beyond the Syrian crisis: it leads to, among other issues, Russia's strong support for Iran, puts an immediate end to the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) discussion within the UN, and abruptly brings to an end cooperation within the UNSC on a number of issues. In addition, as a result the situation in Lebanon destabilizes, and the relations between Iran and the West deteriorate further.

Policy options for the international community in this scenario:

- Work towards achieving unity between opposition groups inside and outside Syria, to ensure an inclusive post-Assad polity and to keep spoilers from obstructing the transition. Also, clear agreements with Syria's new leadership on the protection of *all* civilians and human rights is key;
- Closely monitor regional developments that could have a "backlashing" effect on the Syrian crisis, and if requested, provide (military) assistance to Syria's neighboring countries (Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq) in an effort to prevent spill-over and the emergence of spoilers;
- Prevent regional and international sponsoring of jihadist elements of the Syrian opposition, by applying diplomatic pressure where needed;
- Focus international attention on the biological and chemical weapon stocks in Syria, in particular the control over these weapons and consider their removal in a UN mandated military operation;
- Consider the participation in the establishment of a no-fly zone (and possibly the provision of covert military support on the ground);
- Participate in a stabilization mission after the departure of Assad;
- Provide durable support for institutional reform, to make Syria's state structures adaptable to a post-Assad political reality;
- Provide assistance in Security Sector Reform (SSR), including the civilian police, border control and the demobilization of remaining militias (DDR);
- Provide full support for the democratization process (including elections);

- Provide support to rule of law and the promotion of good governance;
- Offer assistance for the recovery of Syria's economy in the post-conflict phase;
- Continue the provision of humanitarian assistance to victims of the violence, internally displaced, and refugees in neighboring countries;
- Within the framework of the UN, work towards the lifting of sanctions against Syria's regime, in particular sanctions that affect the delivery of basic goods and services to the population;
- Within the framework of the UNSC, work towards an indictment of Bashar al-Assad and possibly other regime officials to the International Criminal Court.

SCENARIO 3: Assad's way

Context

The crisis in Syria is currently characterized as a conflict that cannot be won by any of the fighting camps. The peace plan drawn up by the former UN/AL special envoy Kofi Annan has not resulted in a breakthrough. Neither the Assad regime, nor the opposition forces prove powerful enough to attain victory in the short-term. Although the fighting power of the Syrian army remains consistent, the opposition forces manage to uphold their (guerilla style) battle, despite being outnumbered and outgunned by regime troops. In fact, the Syrian opposition has reached the "point of no return" – for security and socio-psychological reasons, giving up the fight is out of the question. The Assad regime on the other hand is well aware that it has "everything to lose" and is determined to continue fighting until the very end.

Scenario

More than two years into the conflict, the Assad regime has neither crippled nor collapsed. Far-reaching economic sanctions are hardly affecting the regime's core, and despite the guerrilla-style tactics of the opposition, it has been able to uphold its military force. Defections of state officials and military personnel continue, but not from the president's inner circle and not to the extent that it affects the security apparatus' structure. The opposition forces on the other hand, have suffered from the regime's military crackdown, but foreign military assistance – notably the influx of cash and weapons from the Arab Peninsula – keeps them going. Importantly, the stream of arms and weapons has particularly benefited Al-Qa'ida affiliated groups, enabling them, more than the FSA, to maintain a level of organization necessary to continue the battle.

Internationally, after months of talks and negotiations, the mission of UN special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi expires without reaching a diplomatic breakthrough. As all political and diplomatic options to end the crisis have been exhausted, the realization sinks in that the Syrian conflict is militarized. Without international agreement on a unified non-military response to the crisis, the floodgates are further opened for regional powers to pursue their interests in the region and supply armed groups fighting against Bashar al-Assad. The approach of the Arab Gulf states rests entirely on military support for Islamist groups in order to bring Assad down as soon as possible. Within the context of Syria's complex sectarian landscape, this decision backfires when jihadist groups attack a Christian village and brutally slaughter its inhabitants.

The sectarian-based violence against Christian villagers shakes up the international community, in particular Western countries, confronted by the tragic backlash of military support to extremist groups. Western contemplations quickly lead to the recognition that the price of ousting Bashar al-Assad has become too high, and that a "stable enemy" is a more desirable outcome than the

domination of a crucial region by a web of Al-Qa'ida affiliated groups. The immense human loss in Syria's sectarian violence, and the fear of Al-Qa'ida gaining a stronghold in the heart of the Middle East account for the Western decision to withdraw their support for the FSA. Additionally, Western countries put heavy pressure on their Arab allies to renounce their military assistance to the rebellion. After months of deliberation and talks, the Gulf states make the strategic decision not to jeopardize their long-term alliance with the United States and Western countries, just to enforce a regime change in Syria. The military and financial support for Syrian opposition groups from the Gulf states is subsequently largely suspended.

The decreased influx of weapons and funds almost immediately causes the Syrian opposition to loose ground. Although it is able to uphold its guerrilla tactics for a few more months, regime troops eventually launch a decisive military blow and push the opposition fighters out of strategically important places. Although parts of the country remain in the hands of non-state armed groups, the regime restores its control over Syria's main cities. Despite regime efforts to "restore stability", retaliation, sectarian violence, and "Al-Qa'ida style" (bomb) attacks continue to frighten Syrian society for years to come. Despite ongoing violence in Syria, regionally, its restored power enables the regime to tighten its alliance with Iran and Hezbollah, and to uphold its hostile position vis-à-vis Israel.

Policy options for the international community in this scenario:

- Work towards achieving unity between opposition groups inside and outside Syria, to help the opposition become a legitimate political (non-violent) force;
- Closely monitor regional developments that could have a "backlashing" effect on the Syrian crisis, and if requested, provide (military) assistance to Syria's neighboring countries (Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq) in an effort to prevent spill-over and the emergence of spoilers;
- Prevent regional and international sponsoring of jihadist elements of the Syrian opposition, by applying diplomatic pressure where needed;
- Continue the provision of humanitarian assistance to victims of the violence, internally displaced, and refugees in neighboring countries.

Concluding remarks

The three scenarios presented in this paper represent three almost archetypical futures for the Syrian context. They center around two key-uncertainties, that is, the survival of the Assad regime and the level of violence. Hence, the scenarios describe 1) The Russian Way: a political solution including the departure of Assad; 2) The Free Syrian Army's way: a limited international military intervention resulting in the ousting of Assad; and 3) Assad's way: survival of the Assad regime as the "best option" to contain radical forces in the region. It is not very likely that any of the above scenarios will become reality. But they do broadly cover the different possible futures Syria *may* face, and therefore they are likely to cover most elements of the actual future Syria *will* face.

In all the scenarios, we identify a number of alternative paths that lead to a similar outcome. As such they do not drastically alter the outcome of the scenarios, but are part of the description. In addition, there are issues in some of the scenarios that could be called "loose ends" and need further attention. For this reason it is wise to reflect on each scenario.

In scenario 1, Moscow's realization that in order to ensure Syria as an ally, Assad needs to leave, leads to a renewed diplomatic initiative. A different motivation for Russia to change its position could be its fear over what may happen with the biological and chemical weapons on Syrian soil. Moscow could be triggered to opt for a political solution out of fear of "chemical terrorism" in the Caucasus, should the Syrian government lose control over these weapons in the course of the conflict. Also the outcome in this scenario does not need to be the complete departure of Assad. To Moscow and some opposition groups, a "limited departure" of Assad could well be an equally acceptable solution. In that case, Assad steps aside as the country's president, but is allowed to govern the historically Alawite coastal area, that would then receive some form of autonomy, creating a whole new set of (regional) problems.

In the second scenario, a limited military intervention leads to Assad's overthrow. The scenario describes a massacre in a Christian village as the event that triggers a military intervention. Given Obama's recent statement about an eventual military response to the use or movement of chemical weapons, in this scenario, a sudden transport of chemical weapons by the regime could similarly trigger the decision for a military intervention. Furthermore, in the immediate aftermath of the conflict, non-state actors will often try to make use of the post-conflict chaos to (violently) pursue their interests. Among these actors are Kurdish nationalist groups, who may claim control over some regions in northern Syria. This situation may not be opposed by Christian groups, particularly if the rest of Syria becomes governed by more fundamentalist Sunni factions. Hence, a limited Turkish military intervention to prevent Kurdish autonomy in North Eastern Syria could be part of this scenario. This would not drastically change the scenario, but rather would result in a "Iraqi style" situation. Nonetheless, it is also possible for the Kurds in Syria, Iraq and Turkey to declare jointly the independence of Kurdistan. This is likely to have much more severe consequences for the region as a whole. Similarly, an ousting of Assad will change the wider regional dynamics. For instance, there are already indications that Lebanon is attempting to wrestle itself from Syrian domination, which will in

turn affect the domestic Lebanese context (in particular the position of Hezbollah). This paper does not go into these details, but the wider implications of Syria on the region should not be overlooked.

Finally, the third scenario is characterized by the survival of the Assad regime. It describes how a sectarian-based massacre by jihadist groups marks a change in the Western and, eventually, Arab support for the rebels. A different trigger leading to the same outcome (Assad's survival) could be the escalation of the conflict between Israel and Iran. In the event of a war between the two regional powers, the Syrian conflict may fade into the background and the opposition may lose its momentum and possibly foreign support. It is, however, also imaginable that in such a situation the covert support to Sunni and Al-Qa'ida affiliated groups increases, which may lead in the direction of scenario 2 and even a proxy war in Syria. It is also worth noting that it is conceivable that Bashar al-Assad and his core family leave the country, but that the regime is continued by state officials from the "inner circle". This possibility emphasizes that a distinction is needed between Bashar al-Assad the president, and the Assad regime. Moreover, the departure of one does not necessarily mean the end of the other. In the long-term, this scenario may also move towards fragmenting the country into different areas governed by the regime, militias, clans and tribes. As such it could then become very similar to scenario 2.

Based on all three scenarios, several general conclusions can be drawn.

First, Syria will likely witness a level of violence for years to come. "Violence" is understood as a mix of sectarian-based violence, "Al-Qa'ida style" violence (by radical Islamist elements), and retaliation violence. In the scenarios explored here, the intensity and nature of the violence varies. In scenario 1, retaliation and "Al-Qa'ida style" violence remains, even after a political solution is reached. Whereas scenarios 2 and 3 are also characterized by sectarian strife on top of retaliation violence and violence by Al-Qa'ida affiliated groups. Scenario 3 adds to that mix (extreme) violence by the Assad regime.

Second, the conflict in Syria is changing the regional dynamics, which affects stability in neighboring countries (Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan) and sharpens regional tensions (notably between Sunni and Shi'a, and between Turkey and the Kurds).

Thirdly, in case of a departure of Bashar al-Assad, it is unclear whether the regime survives and if so, which state institutions remain viable and functioning.

Finally, the fragmentation of Syria into different areas of control is a serious possibility. This would create space for regional (non-state) actors, among which Al-Qa'ida affiliated groups, to exert power and gain influence.

Policy recommendations: robustly preparing for the future

A scenario exercise is a helpful instrument in developing robust policy options. The different policy options for each scenario have been summarized in Figure 2 below. Based on the three scenarios described, and bearing in mind the limitations of the influence of the international community, these policy options need to be considered, generally in the context of international partnerships, such as the United Nations, the European Union and NATO.

Figure 2: Policy options matrix "Syria 2013 – Preparing for persistent turmoil?"

Policy option	The Russian Way	The Free Syrian Army's way	Assad's way
Work towards achieving unity between opposition groups inside and outside Syria	X	X	X
Closely monitor regional developments that could have a "backlashing" effect on the Syrian crisis, and if requested, provide (military) assistance to Syria's neighboring countries (Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq) in an effort to prevent spill-over and the emergence of spoilers	X	X	X
Prevent regional and international sponsoring of jihadist elements of the Syrian opposition, by applying diplomatic pressure where needed	X	X	X
International attention on the biological and chemical weapon stocks in Syria, in particular the control over these weapons and consider their removal in a UN mandated military operation	X	X	
UN peacekeeping mission in Syria, directly following the departure of Bashar al-Assad	X		
Establishment of a no-fly zone (and possibly the provision of covert military support on the ground)		X	
Stabilization mission after the departure of Assad		X	
Durable support for institutional reform, to make Syria's state structures adaptable to a post-Assad political reality	X	X	
Assistance in Security Sector Reform (SSR), including the civilian police, border control and the demobilization of remaining militias (DDR)	X	X	
Support for the democratization process (including elections)	X	X	
Support to rule of law and the promotion of good governance	X	X	
Assistance for the recovery of Syria's economy in the post-conflict phase	X	X	

Assistance to Syria's neighboring countries as they work to return refugees to Syria	X		
Continue the provision of humanitarian assistance to victims of the violence, internally displaced, and refugees in neighboring countries	X	X	X
In the long(er) term, assist in efforts to start a truth and reconciliation process	X	X	
Within the framework of the UN, work towards lifting sanctions against Syria's regime	X	X	
Within the framework of the UNSC, work towards an indictment of Bashar al-Assad and possibly other regime officials by the International Criminal Court		X	

"Robust" policy options are those policy instruments that fare well in all three scenarios and would therefore be sound policy to start with. Following from the above figure, these are:

- Continue efforts to unite the Syrian opposition inside and outside Syria, with the aim of establishing a representative and legitimate counterpart and preparing the opposition for a post-conflict reality. In case of Assad's departure, reach clear agreement with Syria's new leadership on guaranteeing security for all citizens and the protection of human rights;

- Close monitoring of the changing dynamics in the surrounding countries , as the developments outside Syria can have a "ripple" effect on the crisis in Syria, and the other way round. Engage in a dialogue and, if requested, provide (military) assistance to prevent such spill-over or the emergence of spoilers, particularly in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq;

- Prevent the regional and international sponsoring of extremist elements of opposition. Engage in a dialogue with the regional and international players and apply diplomatic pressure where needed in an effort to prevent the support of jihadist elements inside Syria;

- Continue humanitarian assistance for all Syrians suffering from the violence, as well as Syrian refugees in neighboring countries. Prepare for a long-term stay of refugees in those countries due to the security situation in Syria, and offer durable support to those countries dealing with large numbers of refugees.

From the above exercise (see figure 2 above) it becomes clear that scenario 1 and 2 – the political solution and a limited military intervention, respectively – require a number of similar policy instruments. This can be explained by the similar outcome of both scenarios, that is, a transition after the departure of Assad. Although the two scenarios differ in the level of violence that is described,

the nature and intensity of the violence does not require different policy options for the international community. Similarities between the policy options required in scenarios 1 and 2 underscore the importance of the international community's involvement in the transition period after Assad's departure, and thus the current internationally-led preparations for this purpose.

Policy recommendations: not robust, but wise to prepare for

Other policy options that need to be considered because they may be of great importance in the future of Syria and internationally are:

- Continue preparations for a post-Assad Syria, however, consider the possibility that Bashar al-Assad (or the current regime) may remain in power;

- Long-term commitment to Syria, as the present conflict is likely to morph into a lengthy war of attrition. Present preparations for a post-conflict Syria need to be continued, but these should be constantly adapted to the changing Syrian context;

- Bashar al-Assad's and possibly other regime officials' indictment by the International Criminal Court in The Hague is probably not opportune in scenarios 1 and 3. In scenario 2, Assad is most likely prosecuted by the new Syrian government instead of the ICC. Nonetheless, in the scenario that Assad's rule comes to an end, the referral of Assad to the ICC should be high on the international agenda as an important step in the promotion of international justice;

- Prepare for a stabilization/peacekeeping mission (including assistance in SSR and DDR, rule of law and electoral assistance), which is crucial in any scenario that includes the departure of Assad;

- Focus international attention on the biological and chemical weapon stocks in Syria, and in particular the secure control of these weapons. In a post-Assad scenario consider their removal, if necessary, through a UN mandated military operation.

Policy recommendations: steering towards a more positive scenario

The above policy options are required to prepare for the various scenarios. As such they are explorative. There are, however, also scenarios that may be undesirable and policy instruments that may aim to avoid such scenarios. Recommendations for this purpose are:

- Include all stakeholders in efforts to solve the Syrian crisis, most notably Russia. The Friends of Syria initiative serves as an important international forum. However, in the spirit of inclusiveness, it can be complemented by the Geneva Initiative for Syria;

- Continue galvanizing international support for a political solution. Embark on a political process that includes all stakeholders in the Syrian crisis, most notably Russia. Open a dialogue with Russia to discuss alternative solutions to the conflict, while keeping the option of military intervention on the table;

- Invest in restoring unity at the international level, notably within the UN. The crisis in Syria has painfully exposed the limitations of international collaboration. However, the importance of the UN and the Security Council should be underlined.