



Forecasting Syria's Military and Political Future

By

Mohamed EL Doh

The fall of the Assad regime has marked a watershed moment in the Syrian armed conflict, fundamentally ushering in a new phase of military and political uncertainty. This development intensified regional and international competition for influence in Syria, with profound implications for the country's stability and the broader Middle East. Critical factors are already shaping Syria's future in the post-Assad era.

The collapse of the regime created a tremendous power vacuum, with various actors vying for control over Syria's fragmented political and military landscape along with the main aim of shaping the country's trajectory. Iran remains deeply entrenched in Syria through its network of allied militias and its strategic interests in the region. Tehran's ability to sustain its presence and influence will depend on its capacity to mobilize resources and navigate mounting international and regional opposition.

In a post-Assad context, Iran may seek to carve out autonomous zones of influence, particularly in areas of strategic importance such as southern Syria and the corridor connecting Damascus to Lebanon. However, with the Assad regime no longer in power, the United States and Israel are likely to intensify their efforts to prevent Iran from filling the power vacuum. This could include targeted military actions, support for opposition groups, and diplomatic pressure on Iran and its allies. These countermeasures will play a very important role in shaping the balance of power in Syria and limiting Tehran's ability to consolidate its position.

In the same vein, ISIS is likely to re-emerge again in the Syrian scene, which has already prompted US Central Command forces to [conduct](#) a series of airstrikes to eliminate ISIS camps in central Syria. The existing fragmentation among opposition forces over the past years is likely to continue and despite the fall of Assad's regime, the absence of a centralized authority has exacerbated divisions among Syria's opposition groups, including factions with divergent political and ideological agendas.

External support for these groups will be a decisive factor in determining whether they can coalesce into a viable political and military force or remain fragmented, thereby prolonging instability. In this respect, the role of international and regional powers in supporting different opposition groups in Syria will be detrimental about how the tense situation in Syria unfolds.

Regional actors including Turkey, Israel, Iran, and Gulf Arab states are poised to play a more prominent role in Syria's post-Assad future. Turkey has already expanded its influence in northern Syria, while Gulf states may seek to assert their presence by supporting moderate factions. However, Turkish involvement is more complicated, given that Turkey aims to take control of influencing Syria. The ongoing armed conflict between Turkish forces and [Kurdish](#) controlled Syrian cities in the North is likely to intensify.

In this regard, it is worth noting that Kurdish forces in Syria were originally [supported](#) by the US and considered one of the main local allies in the fight against ISIS. The interplay among these powers will significantly influence Syria's trajectory and the broader regional order.

Russia's evolving strategy for Syria is still worthy of consideration. Russia's role in Syria has become more precarious following the fall of the Assad regime. Moscow already faces many challenges of recalibrating its strategy to safeguard its regional interests, which include maintaining access to its naval bases in the Mediterranean, countering Western



influence, and preserving its role as an influential actor in the Middle East. The Kremlin's ability to adapt to the new reality will determine its long-term relevance in Syria. Despite speculations that Russia is likely to negotiate maintaining naval bases with the controlling opposition force led by Al-Jolani, it can be also assumed that Turkey will be the main negotiator with Russia with regard to allowing Russian forces access to Syrian soil.

Overall, the fall of the Assad regime represents a major setback for Russia, which had invested heavily in propping up the Syrian government as a cornerstone of its Middle East strategy over the past decade. Accordingly, Moscow now faces a host of strategic challenges.

With the Assad regime gone, Russia has lost a key partner that provided it with a foothold in the Middle East. This development undermines Moscow's ability to project power in the region and challenges its status as a dominant player in the Syrian conflict. Russia must now contend with the risk of its influence being marginalized by other actors, including Turkey, and the US.

Russia's airbase in Hmeimim and its naval facility in Tartus are critical to its military strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean. Therefore, the fall of the Assad regime has exposed these facilities to heightened security risks, including potential attacks by opposition forces or Islamist groups. Protecting these assets will require significant resources and a re-evaluation of Russia's military posture in Syria, which can be challenging for Russia given its existing war with Ukraine.

The collapse of the Assad regime diminished Russia's ability to dictate the terms of international engagement in Syria. Without a stable Syrian government to anchor its strategy, Moscow will struggle to assert its influence in negotiations over Syria's future. This loss of leverage could weaken Russia's position not only in Syria but also in broader Middle Eastern geopolitics.

Scenarios for Syria's Post-Assad Future

The fall of the Assad regime presents a range of possible outcomes, each with distinct implications for regional and international actors. These scenarios may include the following.

Continued Fragmentation

The most likely short-term scenario is the persistence of fragmentation, with various factions and militias controlling different parts of the country. This will lead to prolonged instability and create opportunities for external actors to widen their influence.

For Russia, this scenario presents both challenges and opportunities, as it seeks to secure its interests while navigating a highly complex landscape. The same applies to Turkey. Turkey is, however, well-positioned to expand its influence, particularly in northern Syria, where it already established a significant military presence. This scenario could lead to increased friction with Russia, as Ankara's ambitions conflict with Moscow's strategic objectives in Syria. Furthermore, armed conflict between Turkey and Kurdish controlled areas, which are supported by the US, are likely to escalate.

Accordingly, the situation in Syria represents a new challenge to the Trump administration regarding its Middle East engagement policy. On one hand, President Donald Trump has [indicated](#) that Turkey holds the key to Syria's future. On the other hand, the US already [fears](#) that the ongoing military build-up by Turkey, along the Syrian border, signals that Turkey is preparing for a large-scale invasion to areas held by the American-backed Syrian Kurds.



Iranian Consolidation

Despite the recent Israeli strikes on Iran and its proxies in the region, including Lebanon and Syria, Iran may still seek to fill the power vacuum by strengthening its alliances with local militias, establishing a dominant presence in key areas. Such a scenario would be of a key concern for other regional and international powers and lead to increased military confrontations.

For decades, Syria was under the influence of Iran. Syrian ground routes were among the main routes of supply of armaments by Iran to Hezbollah. Regardless of Iran's current weak state, Iran is unlikely to give up on its influence in Syria. However, it is very likely that Iran-back militias will continue to take a central role in countering any stabilization endeavours in Syria.

Emergence of a New Central Authority VS Escalation of Proxy Conflicts

While very unlikely in the short term, the emergence of a new central authority that can unify the country would fundamentally reshape Syria's future. Such an outcome will depend on significant international support and political compromise.

On the other hand, and more likely, the power vacuum in Syria will increase the likelihood of Syria becoming a battleground for proxy conflicts among regional and international powers. Regardless of the opposition forces' success in overthrowing the Assad regime, still many member of these opposition forces emerged from extremist groups, which prompted Israel to [strike](#) most of Syria's military assets following the country's take over by Al-Jolani.

The rise of ISIS bases in Syria also presents an imminent threat to the region, prompting US CENTCOM to [conduct](#) precision airstrikes targeting ISIS camps and operatives in the region. Pentagon Press Secretary Air Force Major General Pat Ryder stated that the US military presence and primary focus remains on "supporting the defeat of ISIS mission more proactively in terms of disrupting and degrading any potential external operations."

The post-Assad era in Syria is defined by uncertainty, with a host of internal and external factors shaping the country's trajectory. For Russia and Iran, the fall of the Assad regime represents a major strategic challenge, forcing it to rethink its approach and adapt to a rapidly changing landscape in Syria and the Middle East.

As regional and global actors vie for influence in Syria, the country's fate will remain a key barometer of broader geopolitical trends. The decisions made by international actors in the coming months and years will not only shape Syria's future but also redefine the balance of power in the region.

Dr. Mohamed EL Doh is a business development and consulting professional in the defense and security sector.