Syria in 2019: four scenarios

Implications for policy planning

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Clingendael Report

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Cover photo: Four young Syrian boys with toy guns are posing in front of my camera during my visit to Azaz, Syria © Flickr.com, 2012, Christiaan Triebert

About the authors

Minke Meijnders is Research Fellow at the Clingendael Institute. She is part of the Clingendael Strategic Foresight Team, where she is frequently involved in scenario and trend analyses.

Jaïr van der Lijn is Senior Research Fellow at the Clingendael Institute and Head of the Peace Operations and Conflict Management Programme of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

Bas van Mierlo is a former Research Assistant at the Clingendael Institute. His main activities involved scenario building excersises and research on European Defence policies regarding Brexit.

The Clingendael Institute
P.O. Box 93080
2509 AB The Hague
The Netherlands

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Email: info@clingendael.org
Website: www.clingendael.org

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AIC   Anti-IS Coalition
AJACS   Access to Justice and Community Security
CT   Counter-terrorism
CVE   Countering violent extremism
DDR   Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration
EU   European Union
EUMS   EU member state
FSA   Free Syrian Army
GNU   Government of National Unity
HTS   Hayat Tahrir al-Sham
ICC   International Criminal Court
IDP   Internally displaced person
IIIM   International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism
IOM   International Organization for Migration
IS   Islamic State
MS   Member state (EU)
NATO   North-Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO   Non-governmental organisation
PVE   Preventing violent extremism
SAA   Syrian Arab Army
SDF   Syrian Democratic Forces
SRSG   Special Representative of the Secretary-General
SSR   Security sector reform
UN   United Nations
UNDP   UN Development Programme
UNHCR   UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNISMIS   UN Integrated Stabilization Mission in Syria
US   United States

Executive Summary

The main aim of this report is to identify policy options for the future of Syria, using four potential scenarios in 2019. These scenarios are based on an extensive scenario-building process with a wide variety of stakeholders in order to contribute to policy and strategy planning.

The scenarios

The scenarios are built on the basis of two key uncertainties:
1) Will the levels of violence in the Syrian conflict decrease, or will they increase even further?
2) Either by design or by use of force, will governance in Syria fragment further, or will it once again be more centralised?

The plotting of these two uncertainties on two axes results in a scenario framework of four quadrants, each representing one of the following scenarios:

Fragile Peace – *Low intensity violence, central governance:* After Assad was toppled in a palace coup, the former Assad regime reasserted its control over its militias and defeated the remnants of IS. The Syrian parties, except for designated terrorist groups, return to the negotiation table and reach a peace agreement that includes a federal system, headed by the Syrian Government of National Unity (GNU), which is supported by a UN peace operation. The Kurds have their autonomous region in the north. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) is still in control of parts of the Idlib region. As there is some stability in this scenario, reconstruction is slowly gaining more traction and, in general, the situation in Syria is improving slightly.

Reconquista – *High intensity violence, central governance:* After peace talks in Geneva and Astana broke down, the fighting intensified and became more brutal than ever. Following indications that the moderate Sunni Arab opposition groups used chemical weapons against civilians, the West withdrew its support. Assad's forces gain momentum and regain control over most of Syria. In government-held areas, the repression of civilians is severe and terrorist attacks and bombings are frequent. The Assad regime fights a high-intensity war to reconquer the remaining rebel-held areas.

Warlordism – *High intensity violence, fragmented governance:* After the liberation of Raqqa, the breaking of the siege of Deir ez-Zor, and the territorial defeat of IS, international actors signed a peace agreement that forced their proxies to lie low.

However, as differences between the different Syrian parties over the governance of Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor resurfaced, fighting resumed. As the situation deteriorates, the government and opposition forces fragment and the country turns to a patchwork of fiefdoms. All politics are local, and there are regular violent clashes between the warlords. International actors are reluctant to intervene in the conflict.

Frozen Conflict *– Low intensity violence, fragmented governance:* After large-scale ethnic cleansing, international and regional actors pressured their proxies into accepting a ceasefire. Reaching a peace agreement on the future of Syria appeared impossible. Violence in Syria decreases and the conflict is effectively frozen. The country is carved up into separate statelets, each backed by different regional and international players. In some regions, the economic and good governance situation improves, while in others the conflict continues.

The main findings

From the scenarios it appears that:

The continuation of violence is highly probable, even in the more optimistic scenarios. Continuing oppression might initially produce a seemingly stable situation, but this stability should not be confused with long-term peace. Yet, the longer the conflict continues, the larger the chance of fragmentation (Warlordism scenario) or possibly even ethnic cleansing (Frozen Conflict scenario).

Another destabilising factor for the future of Syria is the tensions between the Syrian government and the Kurds. These could spin out of control, for example when both parties face each other in battle around Deir ez-Zor. This is particularly dangerous as each side is backed by different external powers.

The territorial defeat of IS is not likely to mean that the organisation ceases to exist. Rather, in such a scenario it is likely to adapt its strategy, continue underground, and use more guerrilla and terrorist tactics.

The problem in Syria is not just IS, but the lack of inclusive governance and equal opportunities in the country. These are the root causes that enabled IS to grow. The organisation is not a cause but a consequence of the underlying political situation. Consequently, the defeat of IS will not lead to the end of the conflict in Syria. In the scenarios in which the root causes are not addressed, the conflict is likely to continue and as well as new conflicts, new extremist groups (IS 2.0) will arise.

Neither the fall of Raqqa, as the *de facto* capital of IS, nor the breaking of the siege of Deir ez-Zor is likely to determine the future of Syria, but how the aftermath of these battles is dealt with. Without a clear strategy, there is a risk that a power vacuum or renewed political, ethnic or sectarian tensions will become a source of renewed conflict, which may lead to the further destabilisation of the region.

Policy implications

Some of the main policy implications following from this scenario exercise are:

- Given the pervasiveness of the root causes of the conflict, the solution cannot be sought in the military realm alone, but primarily in a comprehensive approach.
- The danger of a too narrow military focus dependent on providing military aid to opposition parties is that it might backfire, empowering the militia and warlords of the future.
- In all scenarios, there is a clear role for diplomacy. Dialogue with as many partners as possible on different levels could encourage the conflicting parties to sit at the negotiating table and stay committed to the political process.
- In order to prevent the fragmentation or division of Syria and to increase the probability of peace, a form of decentralised governance or a federal system seems the best option for the country.
- A top-down elite pact or an agreement that is imposed by external actors faces the risk of breaking down. It is therefore important that a future political settlement results from a bottom-up approach and is owned by the grassroots population.
- Since it is unlikely that governance in Syria will again be centralised and some areas of the country will face more violence than others, different regions will require different forms of attention. The policy options to manage the conflict and reconstruct the country will therefore have to be adjusted to local needs and are likely to differ significantly for each region.
- Last but not least, the possible partners and coalitions for EU member states will depend on which scenario transpires and which particular instrument is employed, as well as on the region of Syria in which it is applied. In the Fragile Peace and Warlordism scenarios, there will be much more space for international cooperation (i.e. including Russia, Iran and Saudi Arabia) than in the Reconquista and Frozen Conflict scenarios, while partners in Idlib will differ from those in Deir ez-Zor.

1   Introduction

There are few reasons to be optimistic about the near future of Syria. The civil war, which began as a peaceful uprising against Syria's President Bashar al-Assad in 2011, is marked by the extreme use of force and devastation, which has caused great suffering among the Syrian people. Tens of thousands are involved in the fighting, up to half a million Syrians have been killed, and almost half of the pre-war population has been displaced. As the war has progressed, it has grown more and more complex. It is fought on multiple fronts by a wide array of actors, in changing coalitions. To complicate matters further, it has also drawn in global and regional actors.

The international community has been responding to the conflict in Syria in a variety of ways. Diplomatically, the UN, under the guidance of Kofi Annan, Lakhdar Brahimi and subsequently Staffan de Mistura, has tried to reach a political solution to the conflict. Iran, Russia and Turkey tried to bring the Syrian military groups together in a series of talks in Astana, Kazakhstan. And on the humanitarian front, UN organisations have been involved in, among other things, hosting and supporting refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), and providing food and other forms of assistance. In addition, bilateral and multilateral donors, such as the EU, have provided financial and in-kind aid through a broad range of projects. The US-led military Anti-IS Coalition (AIC), Operation Inherent Resolve, has also applied a variety of non-military instruments, by means of its various working groups.

Additionally, a number of – at times conflicting – military interventions have been undertaken by international actors. These include bilateral interventions by Iran, Russia and Turkey, and by the AIC. In general, these international actors have different goals. For example, Russia's main aim is to maintain its influence in Syria and therefore it supports Assad, while the aim of the AIC is to defeat Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria. Due in part to these international military campaigns, IS has lost large parts of its territory in both Syria and Iraq. The former self-proclaimed capital of the IS caliphate, Raqqa, has recently fallen to Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The Syrian government's efforts to regain control over large parts of Deir ez-Zor province and town, are likely to result in IS losing more terrain.

Policy makers trying to grapple with and prepare for Syria's future are facing a complex and difficult task. How will the future evolve? What are the possibilities when these futures materialise? Commissioned by the Netherlands' ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence, this study explores the possible futures for Syria and ways in which to prepare for each scenario. It does not aim to predict the future, but rather outlines

several possible futures by critically thinking through what might happen. As such, it aims to stimulate an open, yet structured, discussion about the future of Syria: What developments are likely or possible? How should these be addressed?

Methodology

This report's scenario planning follows the Shell methodology.[1] Data on which to build the scenarios were gathered at three scenario workshops held in The Hague, complemented with desktop research, interviews and an extensive review process. Participants in the scenario workshops included policy makers from the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence, academic experts on Syria and the Middle East, Syrians with close ties to people living in the conflict areas, and representatives of civil society organisations.

Probabilities and (key) uncertainties for the future of Syria and policy planning

At its core, scenario thinking looks into what is probable and what is uncertain for the future of Syria. Its key purpose is to determine the major forces driving the future of Syria. Based on discussions in the scenario-building workshops, probabilities, uncertainties and key uncertainties were identified.

Probabilities
Given the short-term horizon of just one-and-a-half years, it is probable that in 2019 the situation in Syria will remain very unstable. Ethnic, political and sectarian tensions are likely to remain a source of conflict. Many Syrians will still be either refugees or internally displaced. Regional powers, such as Iraq, Iran and Turkey, will still determine developments in the region and contribute to ongoing tensions. Turkey will still have great difficulties in accepting Kurdish influence along its south-eastern borders. Furthermore, the Syrian economy will lie in ruins, while governance in the country will be fragmented or limited and faced with an abundance of weapons and a variety of armed militias, including terrorist groups and pro-Assad militias.

Uncertainties
Despite the comfortless probabilities mentioned above, many other things can change within the time span of one-and-a-half years. Three main clusters of uncertainties involve the future of IS, the future of Assad, and a potential future peace agreement. First, it is uncertain whether by 2019 IS will be completely territorially defeated, or

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1   Shell International BV, *Scenarios an explorer's guide*, The Hague: 2008.

not. And even if IS has been dealt with, will other radical Islamist groups be able to control territory in Syria? Another factor is the position of Syria's current president, Bashir al-Assad. Will he still be in power and will his government's control over Syria increase or decrease? Will the regime regain some form of legitimacy, or will resistance continue? If Assad remains in power, will he eventually be accepted by Western leaders as a negotiating partner or will they continue to seek his prosecution by the International Criminal Court (ICC)? Third, will there be a peace agreement or not? And if there is a peace agreement, will it be between regional and global powers, national actors, or a combination of both? And if the latter is the case, will such an agreement be bottom-up or top-down? In addition to these three clusters of uncertainties, the following uncertainties will also play a role:

• Will the cohesion of the opposition forces increase or decrease?
• Will the Kurds gain an autonomous region or will they be crushed?
• Will there be a large-scale US military intervention, or not?
• Will there be enough international will to solve the crisis, or not?

The key uncertainties
The two key uncertainties for the future of Syria (in 2019) are:
1) Will the levels of violence in the Syrian conflict decrease, or will the levels of violence increase?
2) Either by design or by the use of force, will governance in Syria fragment further, or will it again be more centralised?

The scenarios
The key uncertainties have been displayed in a simplified manner in the scenario grid in Figure 1. The x and y axes represent the two key uncertainties above. By using two agreed-upon uncertainties, it is ensured that these scenarios are robust and produce plausible scenarios.

Each quadrant represents one scenario. In this scenario report, the scenarios in quadrants (1) low-intensity violence and central governance (Fragile Peace); (2) high-intensity violence and central governance (Reconquista); (3) high-intensity violence and fragmented governance (Warlordism); and (4) low-intensity violence and fragmented governance (Frozen Conflict) are developed further.

Central governance

Scenario 1. Fragile peace	**Scenario 2.** Reconquista

Low intensity violence

High intensity violence

Scenario 4. Frozen conflict	**Scenario 3.** Warlordism

Fragmented governance
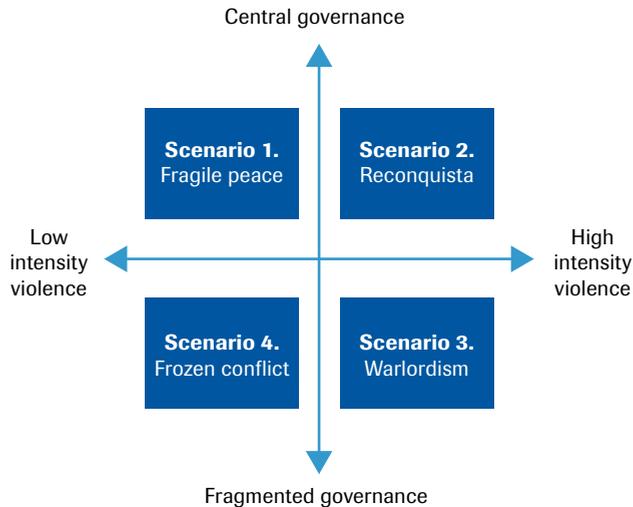
Figure 1   The scenario grid and the four scenarios

Policy planning

These scenarios are not an end in themselves. They serve as a vehicle for strategic policy planning by allowing an exploration of the different policy options in a comprehensive manner. At a point when the scenarios were sufficiently developed, a policy planning workshop was organised to determine the policy options for each scenario. Based on this workshop, and following discussions with policy makers and experts, plus the feedback from reviews, this study considers instruments from, among other fields, defence, development, diplomacy, humanitarian and governance. In addition, it looks at the potential partners and coalitions that might employ each instrument, along with their geographical reach – nationwide or only in certain regions of Syria.

Reading guidance

The scenarios are outlined in the following chapters. Each of the four scenario descriptions starts with a 'future history' of Syria up to the beginning of 2019. This describes what has happened in the recent past that explains how we ended up in this specific scenario in early 2019. This is followed by a description of 'the situation in 2019' in this scenario. Each scenario concludes with an enumeration of the main policy options for that scenario. The report concludes with the overall findings and recommendations that follow from the scenario planning.

2 Fragile peace

A future history

During 2017, US President Donald Trump worked quietly to implement his secret plan to defeat IS. During his May 2017 visit to the Middle East, he closed a large arms deal with Saudi Arabia. Apparently, however, he did not just talk business. He also ensured that, as part of the arms deal, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states would effectively curtail military support and financial flows to IS in exchange for a stronger anti-Iran policy. Subsequently, Trump and the Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed that Russia would shift the focus of its air campaign to the destruction of IS and to persuading Iran to refrain from major actions on the ground, in exchange for a Russian and Iranian role in post-IS Syria.

Meanwhile, President Bashar al-Assad's grip on pro-government militias, which had thrived amid the chaos of the war, became weaker and weaker. He was increasingly confronted with clashes and insubordination among these militias. In the winter of 2017, some local commanders from pro-government militias ran amok in government-controlled areas, particularly in Damascus. As Assad was unable to control these forces, a number of powerful figures in his inner circle decided it was time to act to preserve the position of the regime. On 14 December 2017, they toppled Assad in a palace coup, replacing him with a more moderate looking Alawite.

Instead of focusing on the fight against opposition groups, the new Syrian leadership prioritised getting the pro-government militias back under its control. Subsequently, it continued to clean up the remains of IS. Raqqa had already fallen to the SDF and, after intense battles and continuous Russian air support, the government gained control of the remaining parts of Deir ez-Zor province. The defeat of IS opened the possibility for renewed peace talks in Geneva. The fact that Assad had been replaced also made it easier for the Syrian opposition and external parties to accept a role for the former-Assad regime in the future of Syria.

The December 2018 UN-brokered Geneva Peace Agreement for Syria, between the Government of Syria and the National Coalition for Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, was a well-crafted political compromise that, although not ideal, was good enough for the main internal and external parties. The EU, Russia and the US, as well as the main regional players, took upon themselves the role of guarantor of the agreement. In broad lines, the political solution in Geneva comprised a federal political system, in which many powers were delegated to lower-level units. A central Syrian Government of National Unity (GNU) was installed, but was largely symbolic. As part of the Geneva

agreement, the international actors – the US, EU and Russia – and the regional actors – such as Iran, Hezbollah, Turkey and the Gulf states – agreed to disengage militarily, withdraw all their troops and equipment from Syrian territory, and cease any form of military assistance. Only one exception was made, for the Russian naval base in Tartus, which was the only military base that pre-existed the civil war. Many experts were hopeful, arguing that, although the agreement was imposed by external powers, it had support on the ground. Only the radical opposition groups – such as HTS and IS – which continued to apply terrorist tactics, such as bomb attacks – remained uncommitted to the peace process.
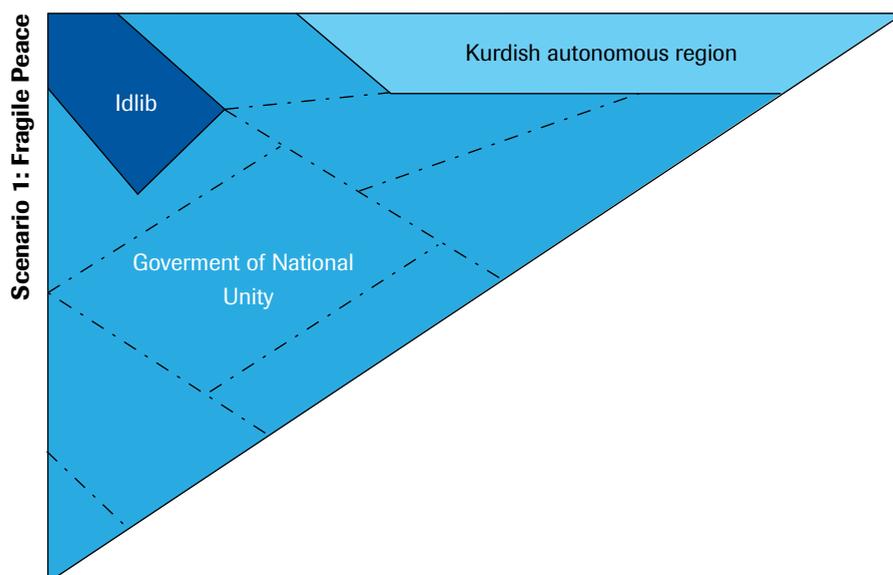
Figure 2   The situation in Syria in the Fragile Peace scenario

Fragile Peace scenario – main characteristics

- Peace agreement between Syrian regime, moderate Sunni Arab and Kurdish opposition, and international actors
- Federal system with Government of National Unity (with Kurdish autonomous region)
- Some stability in large parts of Syria
- Region around Idlib very fragile
- IS weakened, but still conducting terrorist attacks
- Stability is preferred over good governance

The situation in 2019

Since the signing of the Geneva Peace Agreement, while tensions remain over the question as to who governs the constituent parts of Syria, there is relative stability in the country in terms of security. The security sector (including policing) is controlled largely by the federal units, essentially reflecting the situation on the ground at the time of the Agreement.

The Syrian GNU and its federal units are trying to set up the structures needed to govern the country and to restore some of the institutions. In a number of regions the situation is clearly improving due to the development of some legitimate governance structures. For example, the Sunni opposition groups held on to their own territories in the south and have now established their own regional government. At the same time, the Kurds control their own autonomous region in north-east Syria, their so-called Rojava region. In these areas, access to fundamental basic and social services is improving slightly, and in some cities throughout the county, the reconstruction of schools and hospitals has started. However, millions of Syrians are still suffering as most of the government's social service delivery infrastructure has been destroyed, and governance structures are still weak and often highly corrupt.

Moreover, in order to make the Agreement possible, a general amnesty among the signatories was required. Only Assad has been sent to the ICC, mainly serving the role of scapegoat. The EU and its member states, in particular, are frustrated that transitional justice has been made such a limited priority. Thus, according to many civil society actors, the Agreement is predominantly an elite pact. They fear that it is bound to break down eventually as the grassroots population has not been sufficiently included and sees too few improvements in the field of good governance, and because impunity continues. Only time will tell if they are right.

The region of Idlib remains one of the most fragile parts of the country. During the war, the government deported its last remaining opposition members. Parts of it are still controlled by non-signatory parties, particularly HTS, which was not allowed a seat at the table. Due to the lack of external support, these remaining Idlib-based rebel groups are increasingly unable to carry out large-scale attacks and this conflict slowly fades out. IS continues to conduct terrorist attacks, such as bombings, but is severely weakened. Many fighters have abandoned it and either fled or tried to blend in with the local population.

The UN Integrated Stabilization Mission in Syria (UNISMIS), consisting of third countries' personnel, is deployed to enforce the different parties' commitment to the peace agreement and to support the fragile stability. As there is still a large number of weapons in the country and because the security forces of the different parts of the country have to be organised, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR)

and security sector reform (SSR) activities make up a large part of UNISMIS' mandate. The mission is generally able to carry out its tasks, but implementation of the peace process is slow and UNISMIS frequently faces asymmetric attacks.

In part due to international assistance, reconstruction has started and the economic situation improves, hesitantly. However, unemployment rates are high. The gas and oil fields are controlled by the GNU and reconstruction of oil-producing infrastructure has begun, but production is slow to get on line.

Given the stabilising security situation, the outflow of refugees to neighbouring countries and the EU has diminished. Only a limited refugee stream continues from the unstable region of Idlib, mainly to Turkey. As a result, neighbouring countries and the EU are setting up repatriation programmes for Syrian refugees. While many Syrian refugees desperately want to return home, many have little to return to and therefore voluntary return remains limited. However, as neighbouring countries are closing down camps, some refugees are forced to head back. This limited return of refugees is already causing new tensions in Syria, as those returning often find that their properties have been occupied by others.

The territorial defeat of IS in Syria comes at a price for other conflict regions and the countries of origin of foreign fighters. Large numbers of foreign fighters who joined the 'jihad' in Syria either join other radical Islamist struggles elsewhere or return home, increasing the challenges outside Syria. Also, the situation of the Kurds remains preca-rious. Turkish relations with both the US and the Syrian GNU have recently improved and US military support to the Kurds has decreased significantly. The Turkish safe zone has been handed over to the Syrian GNU, but Turkey continues to be active against Kurdish groups in northern Syria. Rumour has it that Turkey and non-Kurdish elements in the Syrian GNU have an agreement to 'deal with' the Kurdish problem at a later stage.

Main policy options for the Fragile Peace scenario

Ensure the consolidation and implementation of the Geneva Peace Agreement. Contribute military and civilian police personnel and key-enablers to the UNISMIS peacekeeping mission in Syria. Accept that the Government of National Unity includes parts of the former Assad regime. More specifically:

Military and security
• Contribute to ceasefire monitoring within the context of UNISMIS.
• Contribute to DDR in the GNU areas within the context of UNISMIS.
• Contribute to SSR in the GNU areas within the context of UNISMIS.
• Contribute to police training in the GNU area within the context of UNISMIS.

- Continue support for the Access to Justice and Community Security (AJACS) programme,[2] but integrate these police forces in the federal structures.
- Under the guidance of the GNU, contribute to counter-terrorism (CT), countering violent extremism (CVE) and preventing violent extremism (PVE) efforts to deal with particularly HTS (and other extremist groups) in Idlib. Consider continuing these efforts under AIC or NATO flag, or seek cooperation with (a group of) EU member states.
- Support deradicalisation programmes for returning foreign fighters in EU member states. Given that IS is territorially defeated in this scenario, an outflow of foreign fighters (ahead of collapse) is expected.

Diplomacy and politics
- Encourage the EU and its member states to set up diplomatic and pragmatic ties with the Syrian GNU. Assert diplomatic pressure to continue reconciliation efforts, for example, by using economic ties as leverage.
- Assert diplomatic pressure on Turkey (via the EU) to refrain from attacking the Kurdish autonomous region in Syria.
- Assert diplomatic pressure on neighbouring countries (Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey) to refrain from the forced or premature return of refugees.
- Help strengthen the coherence of the different Syrian parties so that they can continue their dialogue, with the help of NGOs or religious organisations, or in cooperation with individual countries.
- Stimulate dialogue and mediation on a national and regional level through the newly-appointed UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and UNISMIS.
- Support local peace processes through NGOs and religious organisations.
- Support the gradual and conditional lift of (EU) targeted sanctions and embargos. Exceptions might be made for some sanctions against certain entities or persons responsible for war crimes against the civilian population.

Governance and justice
- Support capacity- and institution building on a national, regional and local level in GNU areas to govern and deliver services implemented by the EU, UNISMIS, UNDP, NGOs and/or donors.
- Contribute, through EU support and UNISMIS, to the establishment of the rule of law through strengthening accountability, anti-corruption and human rights by providing or supporting training in this field.

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2   The Access to Justice and Community Security (AJACS) programme aims to assist local communities by enhancing the capacity of a number of key security and justice institutions and processes of moderate Sunni Arab opposition groups.

- Support the decentralisation process in the GNU area, both bottom-up and top-down, through UNISMIS, the UNDP, civil society and/or other donors.
- Support electoral assistance and monitoring by UNISMIS.
- Advocate for a process of transitional justice, both bottom-up and top-down. Support the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission and other transitional justice measures.
- Support human rights monitoring and evidence collection through NGOs and UNISMIS, for example through (continuous) support to and coordination with the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM).[3] Support could also be given to prison reform and humane treatment programmes.

Development
- Provide support to the (preferably small-scale) reconstruction of (basic) infrastructure projects in the GNU area in cooperation with NGOs and the private sector.
- Provide support to economic reconstruction in the GNU area, for example by contributing to the reconstruction of the oil fields in cooperation with the private sector, or by providing support to income generation projects through NGOs.
- Support education projects in the GNU areas through NGOs and donors.

Humanitarian
- Contribute to the provision of humanitarian assistance in the region of Idlib, through NGOs, the UN and donors.
- Support the hosting of refugees in neighbouring countries and EU member states, with the help of UNHCR.
- Train members of the Syrian diaspora, support them if they (voluntarily) want to return, support their search for justice (accountability, property issues, etc.) and include them in the political process of rebuilding their country.
- Assist in the safe, informed and voluntary repatriation of refugees from countries such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, and assist in the return of IDPs. Support should be given to these host countries via the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR.
- Contribute to humanitarian clearance and demining programmes in the GNU area, in cooperation with UNISMIS and NGOs, to remove landmines, cluster bombs and other explosive remnants of war.

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3   The International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) is mandated to collect and analyse evidence of mass atrocities and human rights violations in Syria with the aim of facilitating future international criminal proceedings.

3   Reconquista

A future history

After the summer of 2017, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), supported by Sunni Arab militias, gained complete control over Raqqa and the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) broke the siege of Deir ez-Zor. After its territorial defeat, IS was forced to go underground and become a more 'regular' terrorist organisation. At the end of 2017, after peace talks in Astana and Geneva broke down, fighting in Syria intensified and became more brutal than ever. Chemical weapons were used more frequently, while it became increasingly unclear who was responsible for their use. Sometimes there were strong indications that the regime was responsible, but in other cases there were strong suggestions towards the Syrian opposition. In a number of cases it became apparent that moderate Sunni Arab opposition groups conducted chemical attacks on their own population in order to blame the Assad regime. However, instead of gaining more support from international actors, this tactic backfired. Almost all Western support to these groups ground to a halt as the lines between good and evil became even more blurred.

The decreased support for moderate Sunni Arab opposition groups meant that the Assad regime's relative strength increased further. Despite its terrible human rights record, Hezbollah, Shia militias from Iraq and Iran, and Russian Special Forces and air support continued to assist the government. In 2018, the Assad regime started a further 'Reconquista' and regained control over large parts of Syria. First it gained control of most of southern Syria, including the city of Deraa, followed by the eastern Ghouta region. Subsequently, the regime heightened its pressure on the Idlib region, and prepared an attack on Raqqa. This rising dominance of the Assad regime meant that many moderate Sunni Arab rebels faced the choice of either going underground or withdrawing to what was left of the rebel-held territories, primarily in the border and Idlib regions. Some Sunni Arab civilians also fled to these regions, in the context of, among other things, the regime-orchestrated reconciliation (*musalaha*), as they feared government reprisals.

After the defeat of IS and the withdrawal of Western support for the moderate Sunni Arab opposition, the US and many European countries intensified their support for the Kurds in northern Syria in order to maintain a strong foothold in the Syrian conflict and balance out Russian influence. The US and EU member states continued their limited military presence on the ground, and the US military base in North Hasakah expanded significantly. As Kurdish power over, particularly, the Rojava region increased and expanded, frictions with other actors intensified. As the Kurdish region was one of the few areas that remained outside government control, tensions with the Syrian

regime increased. Many Sunni Arabs, voluntarily or by force, left the Kurdish region, causing a new wave of IDPs inside Syria. Lastly, the strengthened Kurdish foothold in northern Syria further antagonised the Turkish authorities, which in response reinforced their self-created safe zone. However, despite small skirmishes, no large-scale battles between the Turks and Kurds took place, perhaps as a result of the pressure exerted by Washington and other NATO allies.
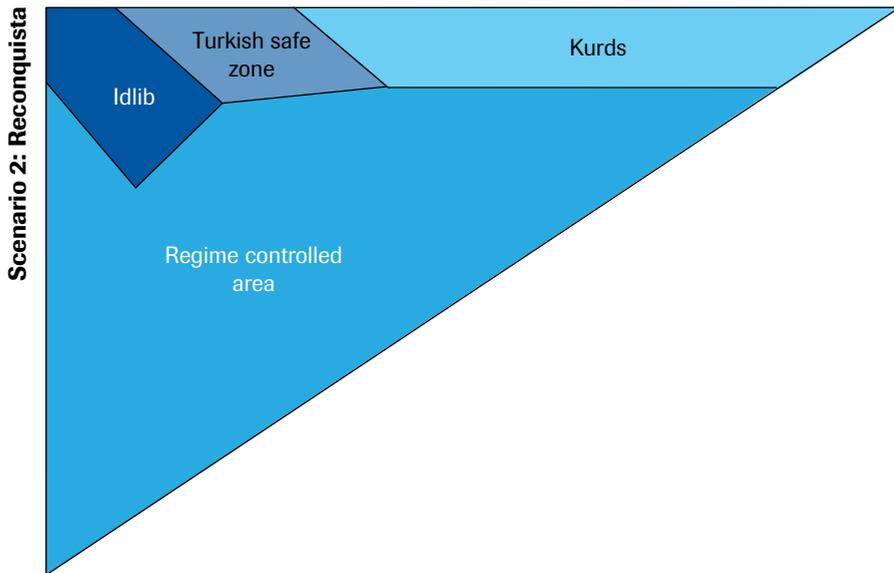
Figure 3   The situation in Syria in the Reconquista scenario

Reconquista scenario – main characteristics

- Assad regime dominant – strong repression in government-held areas
- Violent resistance of opposition groups in government-held areas by means of guerrilla, bomb- and terrorist attacks
- Alleged use of chemical weapons by both opposition and regime
- High intensity war against rebel-held areas (Idlib)
- IS territorially defeated, but still active

The situation in 2019

The Assad regime has regained control over most parts of Syria. Only the reinforced Turkish safe zone and the Kurdish and Idlib regions in the north are in the hands of others. The focus of the fighting is now on the regions of Raqqa and Idlib. The latter, a major stronghold of the Sunni Arab opposition groups, is subjected to frequent large-scale Russian air raids. The government's advance on Raqqa is slow and meets much resistance. At the same time, the government-held areas are ruled with an iron fist and experience high levels of repressive violence. Moreover, as many opposition groups have gone underground, they carry out frequent and large-scale guerrilla and terrorist attacks. This violence follows sectarian, ethnic, political and religious lines. Attacks carried out by IS stand out as they are more often directed at civilian targets. Only a few members of the Sunni Arab opposition have given up and joined the regime.

Government authorities and militias are highly corrupt at every level, and exercise high levels of surveillance and social control over the population under their rule. Anyone suspected of ties to the opposition is likely to face severe consequences. There is no political space for civil society. Some Sunni Arab groups in particular are targeted because of their suspected close ties to IS and other opposition groups. The targeting of Sunni Arabs in turn leads to further grievances among this group, which provides a fertile breeding ground for new radical Islamist groups.

Under these difficult circumstances, the moderate Sunni Arab opposition is trying to unite, but does not succeed. It remains divided, fragmented and uncoordinated because there is a great diversity of groups. The struggle for unification is also complicated by external actors that provide financial and other support to different opposition groups. For example, a number of Gulf states gives formal support to moderate Sunni Arab opposition groups, while at the same time giving covert or informal support to radical Islamist opposition groups that are unwilling to cooperate.

The Assad regime has regained control of all the oilfields around Deir ez-Zor but, due to damages caused by IS sabotage and bombardments by the AIC, it will be a long time before most are productive again. Some exploitation is possible in the gas fields near the city of Homs, mainly for export to China. However, the small amount of income this generates goes mainly towards the procurement of Russian weaponry. With its focus on fighting the rebels, the regime does not pay much attention to providing basic and social services to its citizens. The population struggles to live a normal life. Many basic infrastructure systems, such as those providing sanitation, water, electricity, health care and education, have been destroyed. Most hospitals, for example, are barely functional and many children do not have access to education as their schools are damaged or destroyed. Consequently, the EU and other donors are struggling with a dilemma: as Assad seems to have guaranteed his position, should they now support reconstruction in the areas under his control, or not?

Frequent guerrilla and bomb attacks combined with harsh repression by the regime put enormous pressure on the civilians living in the Assad-controlled areas, who live in constant fear. One consequence of the civil war in Syria is that an enormous part of the young male population has disappeared – killed in combat, in prison, or missing. As a result, more women are now taking up arms and join the SAA or other pro-Assad militias. In general, the population is highly traumatised by the war and social networks are destroyed.

As a consequence of the violence and devastating economic and humanitarian situation, the number of IDPs in the northern regions – the Turkish safe zone and Kurdish-controlled Rojava region – rises. There is also a new outflow of refugees to Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, placing stability in the Levant under further threat. The ethnic balance in Lebanon is undermined further because of the new influx of refugees; Jordan suffers as a result of the unprecedented influx of refugees from southern Syria after the Assad regime regained control over it; and the new influx of refugees gives Turkey, in particular, political leverage in relation to the EU. Ankara is demanding that the EU increases its financial obligations to Turkey and lowers its criticism of Turkish internal political affairs. If the EU does not oblige, Erdogan threatens to let more immigrants go through Turkey to Europe.

Israel is increasingly frustrated by the presence of Shia militias, especially Hezbollah, in southern Syria. There are growing international concerns that Israel is planning military operations in south Lebanon and Syria to neutralise these militias, but for the moment accusations between the Syrian and Israeli governments are mostly hot air.

Main policy options for the Reconquista scenario

Given the limited access to regime-held areas, try to provide localised assistance in 'pockets of peace' elsewhere, even though it is difficult to determine which parties can still be worked with. More specifically:

Military and security
- Provide non-lethal military assistance to moderate Sunni Arab opposition elements in Idlib (and maybe in the Rojava region) through the EU or NATO.
- Support local (community) policing in the region of Idlib and maybe in the Rojava region by, for example, continuing support for AJACS.
- Contribute to CT efforts, limited to the Idlib region, but also be prepared for interventions needed elsewhere. Consider continuing these efforts under the AIC or NATO flag or seek cooperation with (a group of) EU member states.
- Support deradicalisation programmes for returning foreign fighters in EU member states.

Diplomacy and politics
- Assert diplomatic pressure on the Syrian and Russian governments (via the EU and UN) to ensure humanitarian access and reduce violence.
- Assert diplomatic pressure on the Gulf states and the US (via the EU) to refrain from supporting opposition groups militarily.
- Assert diplomatic pressure on Turkey (via the EU) to uphold the EU-Turkey deal.
- Open dialogue with neighbouring countries to ensure a more durable solution for refugees in the region.
- Help strengthen the coherence of (opposition) groups with the help of NGOs or religious organisations or with individual countries, even though it is hard to determine which parties can still be worked with.
- Support international-level dialogue and mediation efforts among major (international and regional) powers.
- Support local peace initiatives through NGOs and religious organisations.
- Support and uphold the current EU sanctions and embargos on the Syrian regime and support additional measures.

Governance and justice
- If possible, support capacity- and institution building on a local level in Idlib and the Turkish safe zone, for example by supporting civil society in general and local councils in Idlib.
- Advocate for a process of transitional justice, which may include the prosecution of Assad and other key figures by the ICC.
- Support human rights monitoring and evidence collection by NGOs across the entire country, for example through (continuous) support to and coordination with IIIM.

Development
- Contribute to the limited possibilities of economic reconstruction, for example through income-generating projects, possibly in the Turkish safe zone, through NGOs and donors.
- Support education programmes in restricted parts of the country, specifically in pockets of peace in Idlib, and maybe the Turkish safe zone and/or the Rojava region through NGOs and donors.

Humanitarian
- Contribute to the provision of nationwide humanitarian assistance in affected regions, through NGOs, donors and the UN. The EU and its member states could put pressure on all donors to ensure that aid reaches all Syrian regions, and urge for transparency.
- Support the hosting of refugees in neighbouring countries and in EU member states with the help of UNHCR. Support the development of long-term strategies for refugees that deal with integration, economic independence and resettlement.

- Train members of the Syrian diaspora in EU member states and other countries to empower them to contribute to the (possible) future peace process.
- Contribute to nationwide humanitarian clearance and demining programmes through NGOs, to remove landmines, cluster bombs and other explosive remnants of war.

4 Warlordism

A future history

Over the past few years, the situation in Syria has deteriorated beyond anything most analysts dared to imagine. The wishful thinking of many international policy makers in 2017 had been that the reconquering of Raqqa by the SDF and local Arab tribes, followed by the territorial defeat of IS, would bring about an end to the civil war.

Indeed, the downfall of Raqqa and the end of the siege of Deir ez-Zor, followed by the territorial defeat of IS, led to an international peace agreement in Astana, between Russia, Iran, Turkey and the US. These international actors also forced their proxies to lie low, meaning that the Syrian government, the moderate Sunni Arab opposition and the Kurdish groups all publically committed to the deal. The settlement consisted of a ceasefire and broad agreement on the governance of a federalised Syria. However, in practice it meant primarily that each group kept the areas under its control and governed them in the way they felt appropriate. In fact, as well as all Syrian parties, many international actors merely hedged their bets, hoping to improve their terms at a later stage. Most Syrian groups did not recognise their positions in the agreement and eventually took up arms again. Meanwhile, the international actors kept pushing for better terms and therefore did not control their Syrian proxies enough to stop the fighting. As such, the agreement turned out to be more of a temporary ceasefire than a peace accord.

The direct trigger for the resurgence of conflict was the situations in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor. Upon liberation, Raqqa and its surroundings were carved up between the Syrian government, Kurdish groups and moderate Sunni Arab groups. The region of Deir ez-Zor also held a fragile balance between the government and local Sunni Arab groups. The fragile balance in Raqqa quickly broke down and turned violent, while disputes broke out around the oilfields near Deir ez-Zor. Subsequently, the situation went from bad to worse.

The US-led AIC continued to support Kurdish groups and, what they considered, moderate Sunni Arab groups, while Russia, Iran and Hezbollah continued their support for the Assad regime and allied militias. Direct tensions between the US and the Syrian regime increased, as more Kurdish- and Sunni Arab group-controlled areas bordered directly with government-held territories, exposing more US military personnel and equipment to regime attacks.

Despite international support, the cohesion of all groups evaporated. Having gained control over large parts of the north, old political disputes among the Kurdish groups resurfaced and, in the absence of a sufficiently strong opponent, these turned violent. Although IS had been territorially defeated, the vast majority of the Sunni Arab population remained dissatisfied. Alongside the moderate Sunni Arab opposition, new and often more radical groups appeared, bent on revenge. As the government was unable to expand its area of influence, it lost territories and was unable to protect its supporters against sectarian and ethnic killings. As a result, internal divisions within the regime became more severe. New militias emerged, protecting their own ethnic or sectarian groups, particularly in the 'secured cities'. With the rise of these new power brokers, the Assad regime slowly crumbled.
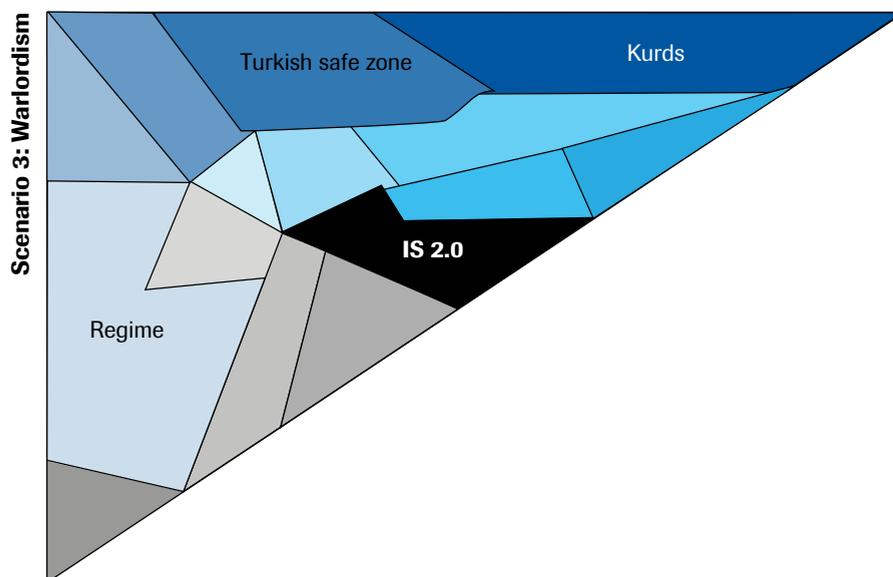

Figure 4   The situation in Syria in the Warlordism scenario

Warlordism scenario – main characteristics

- Syria a patchwork of fiefdoms
- Regime and opposition fragmented
- All politics is local
- Constant violent clashes between warlords
- IS defeated, but new radical groups emerge

The situation in 2019

Syria has fallen into a downward spiral of an ever more devastating and disruptive civil war, with increasingly Hobbesian characteristics. Many of the country's different groups, including the regime, have fragmented further and warlords are controlling many small areas, while they fight over power, resources, religion or ethnicity. Much to the satisfaction of Israel, Hezbollah has been weakened and controls only some of the regions west of Damascus, focusing mainly on the highway between Damascus and Beirut. Former members of the Assad regime control most of Damascus and the surrounding areas, except for the eastern Ghouta region. With the help of the Russians, Assad's official government still holds on to the coastal cities of Latakia and Tartus, but has lost control over large parts of the country and the former army. Other former government-allied militias control parts of Aleppo and Homs. The former opposition is highly divided, not only along ethnic, religious, sectarian and political lines, but also within these ranks. Among the various radical Islamist groups active in Syria, IS 2.0, a new organisation that rose from the ashes of IS, is the most infamous and has become notorious for its brutal forms of violence. The high level of brutality deters new foreign fighters from joining IS 2.0. Whereas IS retained some legitimacy among most people under its rule because, at the very least, it provided some form of basic services, IS 2.0 uses the population as slaves and controls regions solely for its own interests. Consequently, some people long to return to the relative stability of IS.

In a nutshell, all politics have become local and all about security. At the same time, all local forms of governance and self-protection are only partly successful due to the high levels of violence. Good governance, rule of law and human rights are completely absent. In this complex situation, it is next to impossible to keep track of the many different power brokers and their frequently changing alliances. This situation has further traumatised the population of Syria and social networks have been destroyed.

The Syrian economy has imploded completely and has been replaced by small-scale local economies in which non-monetary transactions are common. Oil production has been reduced to almost zero, as almost all pump installations have been dismantled or destroyed in the fighting. Some minor gas fields around the city of Homs are sometimes operational, but they change hands frequently. Currently, IS 2.0 is able to use them to gain strength financially.

Regional actors are struggling with the situation in Syria and try to maintain as much of their geopolitical influence as possible. Iran and Hezbollah, which once dreamed of establishing a Shia east-west corridor from Iran through Syria to Lebanon, now see their plan fail as they are unable to get the support of all the different warlords controlling areas along the route. The Gulf states and Saudi Arabia are also struggling to manage their (former) proxies. The moderate Sunni Arab and radical Islamist groups they once supported and controlled are too splintered. Jordan still has some influence over a few

moderate Sunni Arab groups in southern Syria but, given the level of fragmentation, Amman also struggles. Turkey has some level of control in the north, as its safe zone has now been internationally recognised and is seen as one of the few more stable areas of the country. As a consequence, displaced populations have fled there in great numbers and the situation becomes increasingly volatile due to increasing tensions between different ethnic groups. Despite this, Ankara is still seeking to expand the zone further.

Syria is the epicentre of a massive humanitarian crisis and voices urging the international community to do something to end the tragedy have never been so loud. The silence of the international response, however, has never been so deafening. No international actor wants to burn its hands on the Syrian conflict, as the fragmentation and warlordisation of the country is deemed too complex. Even humanitarian assistance is problematic, as warlords use it for their own benefit. The assistance provided is sometimes the source of renewed fighting, and otherwise keeps rebel groups going. In addition to the complexity, Western actors in particular are reluctant to form alliances with Syrian groups, due to the hideous human rights records of most of these groups. The US continues a drone war against IS 2.0 and other radical Islamist groups, while Israel intervenes occasionally to ensure that Hezbollah does not become too powerful.

The enormous outflow of refugees to Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey has not come as a surprise. These countries now face cross-border skirmishes and see their border regions destabilise. However, experts do not expect this to spill over into civil wars in Lebanon and Iraq.

Main policy options for the Warlordism scenario

Prevent further fragmentation of the conflicting parties. Commit to providing and ensuring access to humanitarian aid. More specifically:

Military and security
- Support the establishment of a no-fly zone above Syria, either through NATO or an international coalition, possibly including the Russians, to prevent parties using their air power.
- Contribute to local community policing in local pockets of peace in the country, and continue support for AJACS.
- Contribute to CT (nationwide), bilaterally or in a coalition, through NATO or by continuing the AIC.
- Support deradicalisation programmes for returning foreign fighters in EU member states.

Diplomacy and politics
- Assert diplomatic pressure on all Syrian parties (via the EU or UN) to ensure humanitarian access, and to demilitarise and reduce violence.
- Assert diplomatic pressure on the US (via the EU) to get Israel to refrain from intervening militarily in Syria.
- Assert diplomatic pressure on Turkey (via the EU) to uphold the EU-Turkey deal.
- Open dialogue with neighbouring countries (Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey) on a more durable solution to the refugee situation.
- Help strengthen the coherence of (opposition) groups with the help of either NGOs or religious organisations, or in cooperation with individual countries.
- Support dialogue and mediation efforts on a national level, through the UN and individual countries.
- Support local peace processes and initiatives through NGOs and religious organisations.
- Support and uphold the current sanctions and embargos on the remnants of the Assad regime, and stimulate debate about whether to extend sanctions to other parties.

Governance and justice
- Support capacity- and institution building in local pockets of peace by, for example, providing support to local councils through NGOs.
- Advocate for a process of transitional justice, which might include the prosecution of Assad and other key figures by the ICC.
- Support nationwide human rights monitoring and evidence collection by NGOs, for example through (continuous) support to and coordination with IIIM.

Development
- Contribute to economic reconstruction in pockets of peace in the country and maybe the Turkish safe zone through donors and NGOs.
- Contribute to education support throughout the country, specifically in pockets of peace, if possible in the Turkish safe zone and the Rojava region.

Humanitarian
- Contribute to the provision of nationwide humanitarian assistance, through NGOs, donors and the UN.
- Support the hosting of refugees in neighbouring countries and EU member states, with the help of UNHCR. Support the development of long-term strategies for refugees in these areas that deal with integration, economic independence and resettlement.
- Train members of the Syrian diaspora in EU member states and other recipient countries to empower them to contribute to the (possible) future peace process.
- Contribute to nationwide humanitarian clearance and demining programmes through NGOs, to remove landmines, cluster bombs and other explosive remnants of war.

5   Frozen conflict

A future history

After the eventual fall of Raqqa, the civil war in Syria did not end. Former IS-held
territories were mostly carved up between the Kurds, moderate Sunni Arab groups and
the government, but a large part of eastern Syria remained ungoverned. As the war
persisted, it became increasingly sectarian and ethnic in character. Killings and counter-
killings led to a climate that enabled ethnic cleansing to take place. After securing their
own autonomous region, the Kurds forced out all Arabs from the territories under their
control, while the population of Kurdish and Alawite villages in Idlib were removed
by Sunni Arab groups to respectively the Kurdish and government-held regions.
In the south, Sunni Arabs purged other minorities, such as Christians and Druze, from
Deraa to the government-held region of as-Suwayda. These government-held areas
remained much more ethnically mixed, although in the context of a regime-orchestrated
reconciliation (*musalaha*), some rebels and their relatives were pushed out, mostly
to Idlib. During 2018, the civil war in Syria came to a tragic nadir of ethnic cleansing,
which caused large-scale movements of the Syrian population. As the government,
the Kurds and moderate Sunni Arab groups were fighting each other, the remnants of IS
were able to regroup and recuperate in the ungoverned desert of eastern Syria.

Continuous fighting, bombing and ethnic cleansing caused enormous suffering
among the Syrian population and led to a new outflow of refugees to neighbouring
countries. The international community's continuing impotence in the face of the
worsening humanitarian situation became ever more shameful. At the height of
the ethnic cleansing, the conflict caused increasing tensions in other countries,
predominantly Lebanon.

In order to prevent losing more face and to prevent further spill-over effects, the West,
Russia and regional actors started to put pressure on the main parties to the conflict
to start talks in Astana. The US, Turkey and Jordan started to restrict the transfer of
weapons into Syria, while Russia stated in implicit, but unequivocal, terms that it would
be ready to walk away from Syria if Assad agreed not to show up at the negotiation
table. In December 2018, under severe international pressure, the government, the Kurds
and the moderate Sunni Arab groups gave in and agreed to meet in Astana. In these
talks, the parties agreed to a ceasefire, which included a no-fly zone and, although
parties were not yet inclined to pave the way towards peace, the ceasefire at least
stopped the immediate fighting and provided the population with some breathing space.
However, in spite of increasing war weariness, no political settlement could be reached.
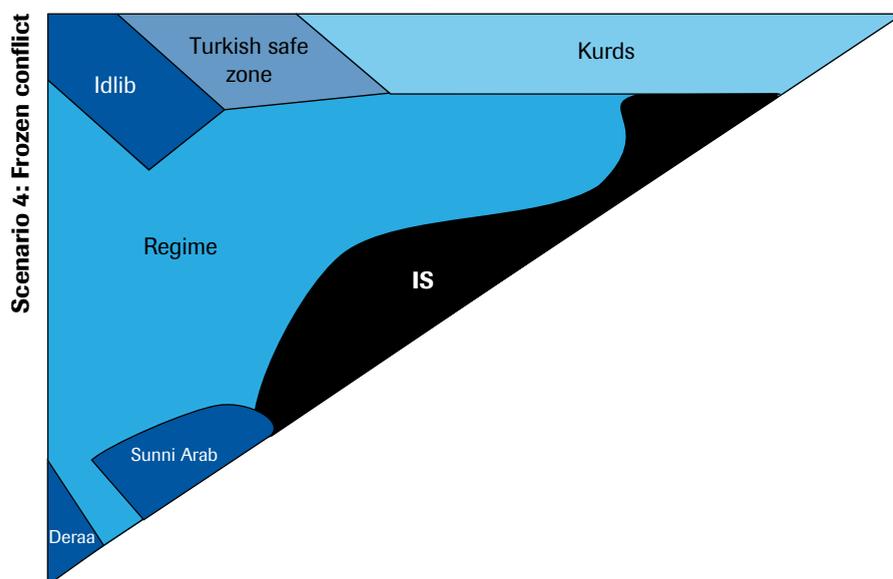
Figure 5   The situation in Syria in the Frozen Conflict scenario

Frozen Conflict scenario – main characteristics

- Ceasefire after ethnic cleansing
- Little interaction between various regions
- Militarisation continues
- Extent of development and good governance differs per region

The situation in 2019

The Astana ceasefire has turned the civil war in Syria into a frozen conflict. The ceasefire has been forced top-down onto the Syrian parties, and is not owned by them. Most armed violence has been brought to an end, but there is no formal peace settlement. The militarisation of the country continues and parties still hope to improve their positions at a later stage. Syria is divided into a number of 'statlets' along relatively ethnic, sectarian or religious lines. These are controlled by different factions, each backed by different international players. The ceasefire lines have *de facto* become their borders. The Kurds control their Rojava region and are supported by the US financially and with a limited number of boots on the ground in US military bases, such as in North

Hasakah. Turkey has gained a strong foothold in the north of the country by holding on to its safe zone. Idlib is fully controlled by HTS and other Sunni Arab groups. Most of southern Syria, with the exception of as-Suwayda, is controlled by moderate Sunni Arabs, and is strongly influenced by Jordan and the Gulf states. The government-held territory, run by Assad but dependent on Russian and Iranian support, is the most diverse area where, among others, Alawite, Christians, Druze and Ismailis live. Many Sunni Arabs also continue to live in this area. Israel is very worried about the relative freedom Hezbollah has in these government areas. Tensions run high, but thus far no large-scale intervention has taken place, probably because Israel fears the potential consequences of renewed destabilisation at its border. The region of Raqqa is divided between its 'liberators'. Moderate Sunni groups hold most of the town, while the Kurds ensure security in the surrounding areas. IS has not been defeated and controls the desert south and east of Deir ez-Zor. It continues to attract foreign fighters, but some of its former fighters have managed to flee. IS has become a nuisance rather than a threat, but is challenging enough to motivate and legitimise the government, moderate Sunni Arab groups and the Kurds to continue their united front against their common enemy and uphold the Astana ceasefire, for the time being.

Large parts of the Syrian population are heavily traumatised by the brutalities of the civil war and the period of ethnic cleansing, and many (young) men have been killed. In general, however, the ceasefire has allowed for some improvement of local governance structures, and the reconstruction of some schools and hospitals is slowly getting underway. The overall economic situation is also improving slightly. However, as the formal economy is completely devastated, it is mainly informal and the black market is thriving. All over the country unemployment rates are very high. Moreover, given the tense situation between the country's various regions, barely any trade is possible between them, just some pragmatic trade between the different regions and the countries neighbouring them.

Apart from these more general observations, levels of progress in terms of governance, social service delivery and economic reconstruction differ according to region. The Turkish safe zone is doing reasonably well as it is increasingly integrated into the Turkish economy. The south is benefiting from Jordanian investments. The government-held areas are going through rougher economic times as Iranian and Russian investments are lower than they used to be. In the Kurdish region of Rojava, the US and EU have started economic reconstruction programmes. This region also benefits greatly from its oil production, which has slowly started again. Worst off is the east of the country, which suffers from IS activities in the desert south and east of Deir ez-Zor. Consequently, reconstruction at the oil sites around Deir ez-Zor has been very limited. The region's makeshift oil refineries have increased in number and pose huge environmental and health risks.

Each of the different regions has its own form of government, but none are remotely democratic and good governance and human rights are not priorities. Only in the south and the Kurdish areas is there space for local civil society initiatives to get off the ground. Most of the flagrant human rights violations that took place during the war remain unpunished. The EU and its member states, in particular, are frustrated that Assad is not brought to justice at the ICC. However, they reluctantly accept that his presence is essential to keep the situation frozen in its current state.

With lower levels of violence in the country, a number of refugees and internally displaced people want to return home, but this is not always possible due to their ethnic or political background. However, neighbouring countries are setting up voluntary and sometimes forced resettlement programmes to return refugees to the regions on the other side of the border.

Although the EU and US on the one hand and Russia on the other support different factions in Syria, coordination and cooperation efforts between international actors in their fight against IS are improving. At the same time, the strong divisions in the country have made any attempt by foreign actors to coordinate aid or start nationwide reconstruction next to impossible. International donors find themselves facing a dilemma: on which region should they focus and can they ignore other regions?

Main policy options for the Frozen Conflict scenario

Prevent the eruption of new violence and a relapse into war. Accept that policy options differ for each region. More specifically:

Military and security
- Support monitoring of the ceasefire by, for example, the Arab League or UN observer mission.
- Contribute to nationwide and local DDR initiatives, probably led by the EU.
- Contribute to SSR in the regions controlled by the FSA and where possible the Rojava area, probably led by the EU.
- Support the establishment of a no-fly zone above Syria through NATO or an international coalition, possibly including Russia, to uphold the aerial ceasefire.
- Contribute to (community) police training at a local level in Idlib, southern Syria and the Rojava region by, for example, continuing support for AJACS.
- Contribute to CT in eastern Syria, where IS remains active, and in the regions around Idlib (HTS), bilaterally or in a coalition, through NATO or by continuing the AIC. Contribute to CVE/PVE efforts in the Turkish safe zone and possibly the Rojava region.
- Support deradicalisation programmes for returning foreign fighters in EU member states.

Diplomacy and politics
- Assert diplomatic pressure on the different Syrian regions/parties (via the EU or UN) to start reconciliation efforts, for example by using economic ties as leverage.
- Assert diplomatic pressure on Turkey (via the EU or UN) to refrain from attacking the Kurds in Syria and to uphold the EU-Turkey deal.
- Assert pressure on neighbouring countries (Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey) to refrain from the forced or premature return of refugees.
- Help strengthen the coherence of (opposition) groups with the help of either NGOs or religious organisations, and/or in cooperation with individual countries.
- Support the continuation of the security-focused Astana process that led to the ceasefire, complemented with an attempt to shift towards more political-oriented national dialogue and mediation efforts. Facilitate a regional security dialogue between the neighbouring countries to address the security concerns of these actors.
- Support local peace initiatives through NGOs and religious organisations.
- Support and uphold the current targeted sanctions and embargos against the Assad regime.

Governance and justice
- Support regional capacity- and institution building to govern and provide services in Idlib (e.g. by local councils), southern Syria and maybe the Rojava region.
- Contribute regionally to the establishment of the rule of law and the combating of corruption, by providing and supporting training in this field in Idlib, southern Syria and maybe the Rojava region.
- Support the decentralisation process, both bottom-up and top-down, through the UNDP, civil society and/or other donors.
- Advocate for a process of transitional justice, which may include the prosecution of Assad and other key figures by the ICC.
- Support nationwide human rights monitoring and evidence collection, for example through (continuous) support to and coordination with IIIM.

Development
- Provide support to the (preferably small-scale) regional reconstruction of basic infrastructure projects, through NGOs and the private sector, on the basis of clear do-no-harm guidelines.
- Contribute to regional economic reconstruction in Idlib, southern Syria and maybe the Rojava region, for example through small-scale income generation projects implemented by NGOs and donors.
- Contribute to education support programmes in Idlib, southern Syria and maybe the Rojava region through NGOs and donors.

Humanitarian
- Contribute to the provision of humanitarian assistance, primarily in the region around Idlib and in the east of the country through the UN, donors and NGOs.
- Support the hosting of refugees in neighbouring countries and EU member states, with the help of UNHCR.
- Include members of the Syrian diaspora in rebuilding the country in those regions where it is possible, train those remaining in the recipient countries to contribute to the peace processes and future reconstruction of Syria, and support their search for justice (accountability, property issues etc.).
- Assist in the safe, informed and voluntary repatriation of refugees from countries such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, and assist in the safe return of IDPs, by supporting these host countries in cooperation with the IOM and UNHCR.
- Contribute to nationwide humanitarian clearance and demining programmes through NGOs, to remove landmines, cluster bombs and other explosive remnants of war.

6 Conclusions

Reflection upon the scenarios

Fragile Peace is generally perceived as the best-case scenario. This situation has its own challenges, such as the fragile security situation in Idlib, insufficient attention to good governance, and the constant fear that the peace agreement might break down. However, it ensures some stability and security, which makes slight improvements in the daily life of the Syrian people possible and may be the beginning of a long-term process towards more peace and stability. Moreover, it is positive that, in this scenario, the Syrians are rebuilding the country themselves. This scenario is, however, not considered the most likely.

Although it is generally considered less likely that the Assad regime will regain control over the south, the Reconquista scenario is considered more probable. In fact, this scenario resembles to a large extent the current revival of the Assad regime in the rest of Syria, especially in the eastern part of the country around Deir ez-Zor. It also captures the probable destabilising effects of increasing tensions and possible conflict between the Kurds and the government.

The Frozen Conflict scenario is also considered more probable, but would be highly unstable and is therefore not considered to be durable. Unlike the three other scenarios, which are considered more 'end' situations, this scenario is generally seen as an intermediate situation. Although it may last for a period of time, in general the Frozen Conflict scenario is expected to deteriorate and develop into the Warlordism scenario or, less likely, the Fragile Peace scenario. The period of ethnic cleansing that precedes the outcome of this scenario is seen as less likely, but possible.

As most participants and interviewees expect the war to continue, they consider the Warlordism scenario, and further fragmentation of the different parties to the conflict, to be the most probable future. This would entail a serious deterioration of the current situation and is therefore generally seen as the worst-case scenario.

Some general conclusions from the scenarios

The above scenarios show that IS is not Syria's only problem. The lack of inclusive governance and equal opportunities under the Assad regime are the roots on which the conflict and IS were able to grow. As such, IS is not a cause, but a consequence. If these root causes are not addressed, the scenarios show that after the territorial

defeat of IS, the organisation is likely to continue fighting. Although the loss of its territorial domain will of course have profound effects on its attractiveness for foreign fighters and its ability to carry out conventional attacks, it is likely to adapt its strategy, continue underground, and use more guerrilla-like and terrorist tactics. Besides, other opposition or radical Islamist groups might arise, such as IS 2.0, and there is no guarantee that such groups will not be even worse than the current one. The solution to Syria's problems should therefore not only be seen in terms of dealing with IS and sought in the military realm, but through a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes, including the challenges posed by the Assad regime. Moreover, as the Warlordism scenario shows, the danger of a military focus dependent on providing military aid to opposition parties is that it might backfire, empowering the militia and warlords of the future.

Even if the root causes of IS and the conflict are addressed, and even in the most optimistic scenario of Fragile Peace, violence is likely to continue, although it is likely to be more localised, for example in the Idlib region. A future of Syria that includes a political role for Assad is not associated with lower levels of violence. While a solution that includes him might look more stable initially, such stability should not be confused with long-term sustainable peace. Not only will the continuation of the Assad regime mean that armed opposition will persist, the regime itself may also become more violent and oppressive over time.

Another destabilising factor for the future of Syria is the tensions between the government and the Kurds. These could spin out of control, for example when both parties face each other in battle around Deir ez-Zor. This is particularly dangerous as both sides are backed by different external powers. If the conflict continues, there is a high risk of ethnic violence turning into ethnic cleansing, with a possible spill-over to neighbouring countries.

Consequently, an important question for the future of Syria is how the aftermath of the battles for Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor are dealt with. Without a clear strategy, which includes all relevant local stakeholders and engages the local population, there is a risk that a power vacuum will be created. This could become a source of renewed conflict and destabilisation of the region, such as is the case in the scenario Warlordism.

Although there is no evidence of a direct relationship between the extent of central governance and peace, on the basis of the four scenarios peace in Syria seems to be more probable with a form of decentralised governance or a federal system. Decentralised governance might prevent the partition of Syria into multiple entities that are each controlled by armed militias or warlords. If parties do not commit to such a decentralised or federal solution and, fuelled by support from foreign powers, try to control Syria as a whole, the country might fragment further and the conflict may be prolonged.

This touches upon the larger issue of ownership. The scenarios show that a potential future political settlement needs to be owned by the grassroots population and local commanders. A top-down elite pact or an agreement that is imposed from outside, such as in the scenarios Warlordism and Frozen Conflict, will face a big risk of eventually breaking down. As in most scenarios Syria will be fragmented or governed in a decentralised or federal manner, it is likely that the approach taken to manage the conflict and reconstruct the country will have to be adjusted to local needs. The possibilities are likely to differ significantly for each region, as are the possible partners to work with. There is a good chance that the south of Syria will be (more or less) controlled by moderate Sunni Arab groups, which will open new opportunities to support this region in various ways. The region of Idlib, on the other hand, is a distinctive area and will probably face a lot of violence and, at the very least, remain fragile, particularly due to HTS. Possibilities to intervene in this region are therefore more limited. The situation in the Rojava region is complex for other reasons. To a certain extent, this region will probably be under the control of the Kurds as part of a potential federal solution or as a (*de facto*) autonomous region. As this region is relatively more stable in most scenarios, it is possible to support, for example, some economic reconstruction programmes or institution-building initiatives. However, this will depend largely on the willingness of Turkey to cooperate.

7   Policy implications

The scenarios in this report are not an end in themselves but aim to serve as a strategic policy planning tool. What can policy makers do given these four potential futures? What are their options to be best prepared? Below, the various policy options – ranging from military, diplomatic, humanitarian and development to governance instruments – are outlined, along with the partners and coalitions that might employ them. Their potential geographical reach – nationwide or only in certain regions of Syria – is also discussed.

The policy options are divided into two categories. First, the *robust options* are the instruments that are relevant in every scenario and are therefore important to plan and prepare for. Second, there are a number of *selected options*, which are instruments that only work in a limited number of scenarios, but which are important to be prepared for when needed. A complete overview of all policy options discussed in previous chapters is provided in Annex 1.

Robust options

Reviewing all policy options, it is possible to identify a number of policy instruments that are relevant in every scenario. Given the strategic nature of this study, the precise tactical or operational implementation of the different policy instruments will differ for each scenario and will need to be adjusted to the specific circumstances and requirements of the situation. The following options are robust and therefore recommended to prepare for:

Military and security
- *(Community) police training:* This is relevant in all scenarios. However, the geographic level of implementation differs significantly for each scenario. Only in the Fragile Peace scenario is it possible to provide training to police officers from the local community all the way up to the national level, because there is a central government that can serve as a counterpart. In other scenarios, the national police force is not generally accepted and may be used as paramilitary units in conflict situations or become militia in the case of fragmentation. However, this does not rule out supporting local community police training, such as within the context of the AJACS programme, in which basic and specialist policing skills are strengthened. In the Fragile Peace scenario, it is important that such local forces are integrated in the federal police force.

- *CT/CVE/PVE:* All scenarios require attention to dealing with terrorism. In some scenarios, the focus will primarily be on CT measures while, in others, PVE and CVE require more attention. In the Warlordism scenario, in which various radical Islamist groups, including IS 2.0, are active nationwide, CT is the main focus. Many radical Islamist groups are also active throughout the country in the Reconquista scenario, but space for external actors is limited to Idlib, as the Assad regime is in control of most of the country. In the Frozen Conflict scenario, IS still has safe havens in eastern Syria and HTS in Idlib, and these require CT attention. In the Fragile Peace scenario, there will still be a role for CT measures to deal with radical extremist groups that have gone underground, but these will be limited. At the same time, the more stable the situation, the more room there will be for P/CVE strategies. Consequently, in the Fragile Peace scenario, international attention to P/CVE is likely to be the largest. In the Frozen Conflict scenario, there are possibilities in a number of regions of Syria, for example in the Turkish safe zone or in the Kurdish region. Space for P/CVE is most limited in the Warlordism scenario, and projects can at best only be implemented at a local level. Lastly, in the Reconquista scenario, CVE/PVE is more difficult given that most of the country is regime-held.
- *Deradicalisation of returning foreign fighters:* In each scenario, EU member states will have to deal with foreign fighters returning from Syria. A surge in returnees is expected just before IS is territorially defeated, when there is still a chance to escape. While most returnees do not present an immediate danger, returnees may remain vulnerable to extremist ideologies. In addition, they may have gained more battleground experience and motivation during their stay in Syria, and have the connections to carry out attacks.[4] Policies that are focused on CVE in EU member states, such as rehabilitation and prevention measures, might prevent this.

Diplomacy and politics

- *Diplomatic pressure:* Although different parties will need to be targeted for different reasons in each scenario, in general the diplomatic corps will be an important instrument. Where possible, diplomatic relations should be maintained or built up with as many parties as possible in order to allow for dialogue and mediation. In addition to bilateral avenues, EU member states can rely on multilateral partners such as the EU and UN. In some cases, this is because multilateral pressure may have more effect, and in others because bilateral relations with a particular country may be difficult. Diplomatic pressure could be asserted on the Syrian parties to ensure humanitarian access and reduce levels of violence in the more violent scenarios, while in the more peaceful scenarios continued pressure to uphold the dialogue would be helpful. In all scenarios, the EU could also engage in dialogue with Syria's neighbouring countries and the Gulf states to prevent further escalation

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4   Alastair Reed and Johanna Pohl, 'Tackling the Surge of Returning Foreign Fighters', *NATO Review Magazine*, 14 July 2017.

of the conflict and to convince them to end their support for opposition groups or to refrain from intervening. All scenarios also require engagement with neighbouring countries to address the refugee situation. Either a more durable solution needs to be found for many of the refugees, or – if the security situation improves – Syria's neighbours will have to uphold the principle of voluntary, safe and informed return. In all four scenarios, Turkey may also decide to no longer uphold the EU-Turkey deal.

- *(Targeted) sanctions and embargos:* How sanctions and embargos can be used differs for each scenario but, in all cases, they can be used to assert pressure or to gain political leverage. As long as the repression of the Assad regime continues, restrictive measures should be maintained and could possibly even be expanded with additional sanctions. In the Warlordism scenario, the extension of targeted sanctions to other parties could be considered, such as to the remnants of the Assad regime, its supporters and designated terrorist organisations. In the Frozen Conflict scenario, sanctions have to be maintained until a peace agreement is signed. In the Fragile Peace scenario, the sanctions and embargos might gradually and conditionally be lifted but, even then, exceptions may be required for targeted sanctions against certain entities or persons responsible for war crimes against the civilian population.

- *Strengthening the coherence of (opposition) groups and supporting dialogue and mediation between the conflicting parties:* The room for manoeuvre for dialogue and diplomacy differs for each scenario. In general, it is a worthwhile investment to create negotiating tables for inclusive talks along different tracks and at different levels. To support fruitful talks, the coherence of (opposition) parties could be strengthened in all scenarios, and the inclusion of women should be ensured in all mediation and dialogue efforts. In the Fragile Peace scenario, continuous dialogue and mediation, primarily by the SRSG, will be required to help national and regional parties implement the peace agreement. While the political arena in the Warlordism scenario is very fragmented, and therefore its possibilities limited, the UN or individual (regional) countries could opt to provide negotiating tables to the conflicting parties to reduce further fragmentation and violence. In the Frozen Conflict scenario, dialogue and mediation between the different regions of Syria could help to bring parties back to the negotiating table to complement the security-focused Astana process, and in so doing make a shift towards a more political-oriented dialogue. Such a process would be supported by an international process, predominantly between the regional powers. The stimulation and facilitation of such a security dialogue between international and regional actors is also the best option in the Reconquista scenario, in order to address their security issues related to Syria and to prevent a further escalation of tensions among them.

- *Support for local peace processes:* In all scenarios, support for local peace processes and initiatives (including women's initiatives) via NGOs and religious organisations is important to strengthen and/or repair social cohesion. As well as mitigating conflict in the Warlordism scenario, local peace processes will also be important to move peace forward at the local level in the Fragile Peace and Frozen Conflict scenarios.

In the Reconquista, Warlordism and Frozen Conflict scenarios there may be less room for local peace initiatives in the government-held territories. Moreover, in the Reconquista scenario there is a risk that the Assad regime will use local peace initiatives for its own benefit (forced surrender). A critical assessment of such processes will therefore be needed before support is given.

Governance and justice

- *Capacity- and institution building:* Although relevant in all scenarios, the level (national, regional or local) and extent to which such capacity- and institution building for governance and service delivery can be supported differs for each scenario. In all scenarios, support for local-level institutions is possible, for example for local councils in Idlib. In the Frozen Conflict scenario, regional institutions may be strengthened, for example in the Rojava and southern regions. Only in the Fragile Peace scenario will capacity- and institution building be possible at a national level for the newly-established federal government and, in fact, be one of the main *foci* of international policy.

- *Transitional justice:* In all scenarios, there is a need to advocate for transitional justice. However, only in the Fragile Peace scenario is it possible to start a process of transitional justice, to address the human rights abuses and mass atrocities that have been committed and to restore the trust of citizens in their institutions. The process may include measures such as truth seeking, institutional reform, criminal prosecutions – including the criminal prosecution of President Assad and other key figures – and reparation programmes. However, even in the Fragile Peace scenario it is likely that transitional justice will face challenges, as it is not likely to be a priority for the parties to the peace agreement and might lead to renewed tensions.

- *Human rights monitoring and evidence collection:* Each scenario requires the monitoring and investigation of alleged violations of international human rights law in Syria, including sexual violence and the abuse of women. Especially in the scenarios in which human rights and humanitarian law violations are frequent, the systematic documentation and analysis of these violations is urgent to lay the groundwork for future accountability. For this reason, continuing support is needed for the IIIM initiative. Even in more stable contexts, such as the Fragile Peace scenario, human rights monitoring remains important and may also serve as a confidence-building measure.

Development

- *Economic reconstruction:* All scenarios require some level of economic rehabilitation and reconstruction but, again, the level to which this is possible differs. In the relatively more stable scenarios, there is much more space for reconstruction efforts. In fact, in the Fragile Peace scenario, reconstruction needs to be one of the main *foci* in the GNU areas to ensure peace dividends of the peace agreement. However, to avoid the risk of corruption and the strengthening of one elite group over another,

small-scale projects should be preferred over large-scale projects. Moreover, policy makers face a dilemma in the scenarios marked by violence. Starting reconstruction during conflict may provide some hope and focus for civilians, but also risks that progress will be destroyed or used for the wrong purposes by conflicting parties.

Humanitarian

- *Humanitarian assistance:* In all scenarios, groups of civilians will be deprived of basic access to adequate food, water and health care. Meeting these humanitarian needs will be most urgent in the scenarios marked by high levels of violence. Especially in the Warlordism scenario, millions of civilians will require urgent humanitarian assistance, including in the regime-held areas. However, two important dilemmas are at play. First, the provision of humanitarian aid may unintentionally prolong the conflict in the long run as it may provide resources to the conflicting parties. Secondly, as providing assistance is likely to require the collaboration of the conflicting parties, the neutrality of the providers may be at risk. There will also be areas in the scenarios with low levels of violence where humanitarian assistance is required. These are most likely to be located in the Idlib region.
- *Host refugees and provide support for projects in neighbouring countries:* In all scenarios, large numbers of Syrian refugees will remain living abroad and, in the more violent scenarios, their numbers may increase. However, even in the Fragile Peace scenario, refugees are unlikely to be able to return immediately as the preparations for voluntary repatriation will take time. Where there are increasing numbers of refugees, the EU could resettle them to alleviate the pressure on Syria's neighbouring countries. It should open a dialogue with the neighbouring countries to seek a more sustainable solution for the refugees. This could include support for regional employment, income generation, education, and food security programmes.
- *Humanitarian clearance and demining programmes:* All scenarios will require the clearance of land mines and unexploded ordnance. However, the extent to which demining programmes can move beyond humanitarian mine clearance will depend on security and stability, and will therefore differ per region and scenario.

Selected options

The following instruments may not be robust in the sense that they are likely to be needed in any scenario. However, it is important to anticipate and plan for them in case the situation in Syria improves (the first three options) or deteriorates (the last two options).

When the situation improves:
- *Support the monitoring of a ceasefire, DDR and SSR:* These options should be anticipated if the two lower-level violence (Fragile Peace and Frozen Conflict) scenarios transpire, and are likely to be tasks mandated to future peace operations.

In the Fragile Peace scenario, these are probably included in the context of the UN peacekeeping operation. Given that there is no peace agreement in the Frozen Conflict scenario, any verification mechanism is not likely to go beyond the monitoring of the ceasefire, although there may be a bit of room for DDR and SSR. Support for DDR and SSR may also be channelled through, for example, the EU or bilaterally.

- *Support the rule of law (accountability, anticorruption, human rights), support decentralisation processes, and provide electoral assistance and monitoring:* When there is a ceasefire agreement (Frozen Conflict scenario), and particularly after a peace accord (Fragile Peace scenario), the international community, and especially the UN, are likely to be expected to assist and strengthen good governance and democracy in Syria.
- *Support the safe, informed and voluntary repatriation of refugees and assist in the safe and voluntary return of IDPs:* In both the Fragile Peace and Frozen Conflict scenarios, the security situation allows for the start-up and implementation of repatriation and resettlement programmes and should therefore be anticipated. However, even in the most optimistic scenarios, the return of refugees might create dynamics that could endanger the fragile local stability.
- *Reconstruction infrastructure:* If one of the two low-violence scenarios transpires, humanitarian aid will have to be quickly up scaled, starting with the reconstruction of infrastructure (transport, water, information, communications, etc.).

When the situation worsens:
- *No-fly zone:* This option is relevant should the Warlordism or Frozen Conflict scenarios transpire. In the Frozen Conflict scenario, a no-fly zone may support the ceasefire from above and help to keep the conflict 'frozen'. In the Warlordism scenario, a no-fly zone may be one of the few military options for the international community to help protect civilians and to contain the situation. In both scenarios, Russian acceptance of a no-fly zone is possible as it would not affect the position of the Assad regime.
- *Non-lethal support to rebels:* Providing lethal support to rebel organisations by arming and training them is dangerous as this may backfire, particularly in the Warlordism scenario. Although non-lethal support may have similar potential in other scenarios, it could be considered, particularly in the Reconquista scenario.

Overarching policy conclusions

Given the wide array of possible policies and instruments, it is important to underscore a few general principles. Regardless of how the future of Syria unfolds, conflict and fragility should be addressed in a comprehensive way as a means to achieve sustainable development, peace and security. When Syria is fragmented and marked by high levels of violence and oppression, possibilities for the international community are limited,

except for localised aid. In the desirable situation of a Fragile Peace agreement, there is room for rebuilding the security sector, to support capacity- and institution building, to strengthen the rule of law, and to start with the reconstruction of the economy and basic infrastructure. In all scenarios, there is a clear role for diplomacy. Dialogue with as many partners as possible on different levels could encourage the conflicting parties to sit at the negotiating table and stay committed to a political process. To avoid new conflicts and violent extremism arising, it is considered essential that the root causes of the Syrian conflict – the lack of good and inclusive governance, and the absence of equal opportunities – are dealt with. Military instruments are generally considered less effective, particularly in the absence of complementary development, governance and diplomatic instruments.

The different possible partners and coalitions for EU member states will depend on each kind of instrument and the scenario, as well as on the region of Syria in which it is applied. In a future in which the Assad regime regains control over most of Syria, international collaboration on managing the crisis is likely to be most limited. In that case, external powers – particularly the West and Russia – are likely to be supporting opposing sides. In a Frozen Conflict scenario, the situation is less explosive, but neighboring countries are likely to have a lot of influence over the different regions of Syria, probably further hindering cooperation among Syrian parties. In case of a peace agreement, international powers are likely to act jointly as they are all committed to the peace agreement and the new GNU. In such a scenario, there is space to make progress. In case of a Warlordism scenario, the opportunities for successful international approaches are most limited, but the circumstances for international cooperation are the most favourable. Given the disastrous situation for everyone involved and the potential effects in terms of terrorism, international actors would have a joint interest in demilitarising the conflict, creating stability, and dealing with terrorist organisations. In such a scenario, Russia is likely to become an important partner for European policy makers.

Annex 1: Policy options per scenario

Policy instrument	Fragile Peace	Reconquista	Warlordism	Frozen Conflict
Military and security				
Monitoring ceasefire	GNU area (UNISMIS)			Nationwide (Arab League or UN observer mission)
DDR	GNU area (UNISMIS)			Nationwide, but also local (EU or bilateral/group of EUMSs)
SSR	GNU area (UNISMIS)			FSA and maybe the Rojava region (EU or bilateral/ group of EUMSs)
Establishment of no-fly zone			X (NATO, international coalition)	X (NATO, international coalition)
Non-lethal support for rebels		Idlib, maybe Rojava region (EU, NATO)		
(Community) police training	Police training in GNU area (UNISMIS) and possible extension of AJACS[6] in cooperation with UNISMIS	Idlib, maybe Rojava (support local community policing through e.g. continuous support for AJACS)	Local in pockets of peace (support local community policing through e.g. continuous support for AJACS)	Regional: Idlib, south, maybe Rojava (support local community policing through e.g. continuous support for AJACS)
CT/CVE/PVE	Idlib (NATO, potential continuation of AIC or bilateral, group of EUMSs)	Idlib, limited (NATO, potential continuation of AIC or bilateral/ group of EUMSs)	Nationwide (NATO and bilateral, potential continuation of AIC)	Regional: Idlib, east and Rojava region (NATO and bilateral, potential continuation of AIC)
Deradicalisation returnees	In the EUMS (++[7])	In the EUMS (++)	In the EUMS	In the EUMS

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5   AJACS stands for 'Access to Justice and Community Security programme, which aims to assist local communities by enhancing the capacity of a number of key security and justice institutions and processes of moderate Sunni Arab opposition groups.

6   ++ means extra focus is required.

Policy instrument	Fragile Peace	Reconquista	Warlordism	Frozen Conflict
Diplomacy and politics				
Asserting diplomatic pressure	• Via the EU/UN on the GNU to continue reconciliation efforts • Via the EU on Turkey to refrain from attacking the Kurds • Via the EU/UN on neighbouring countries to prevent forced or premature return of refugees	• Via the EU/UN on the Syrian and Russian government to ensure humanitarian access, to demilitarise and reduce violence • Via the EU on Gulf states and the US to refrain from supporting opposition groups • Via the EU on Turkey to uphold the EU-Turkey deal • Open dialogue with neighbouring countries on a more durable solution to the refugee situation	• Via the EU/UN on all parties to ensure humanitarian access, to demilitarise and reduce violence • Via the EU on the US and Israel to refrain from intervening militarily • Via the EU on Turkey to uphold the EU-Turkey deal • Open dialogue with neighbouring countries on a more durable solution to the refugee situation	• Via the EU/UN on the different parties to start reconciliation efforts • Via the EU on Turkey to uphold the EU-Turkey deal and refrain from attacking the Kurds • Via the EU/UN on neighbouring countries to prevent forced return of refugees
Strengthening coherence of (opposition) parties	X (NGOs, religious organisations, individual countries, UN)	X, despite dilemma (NGOs, religious organisations, individual countries)	X (NGOs, religious organisations, individual countries, UN)	X (NGOs, religious organisations, individual countries, UN)
Mediation/stimulating dialogue	National level (SRSG)	International process among major (international and regional) powers	National level (UN and individual countries)	International process among major (regional) powers (continuation of Astana agreement) and facilitate regional dialogue
Support local peace processes	X (NGOs, religious organisations)	X (NGOs, religious organisations)	X (NGOs, religious organisations)	X (NGOs, religious organisations)
Targeted sanctions and embargos	Lift (possibly keeping some targeted sanctions to certain persons)	Maintain current and support possible additional sanctions and measures against regime	Maintain current sanctions and measures, extend to other parties	Maintain current sanctions

Policy instrument	Fragile Peace	Reconquista	Warlordism	Frozen Conflict
Governance and justice				
Capacity- and institution building to govern and deliver services	National, regional and local governance in GNU areas ++ (EU, UNISMIS, UNDP, donors and NGOs), local councils in Idlib (NGOs)	Local councils in Idlib (NGOs) and maybe Turkish safe zone (Turkey and NGOs)	Limited, only in local pockets of peace (NGOs, e.g. support local councils)	Regional: Idlib (local councils) south and maybe Rojava (NGOs)
Rule of Law (accountability, anti-corruption, human rights)	GNU area ++ (UNISMIS and EU)			Regional: Idlib, south and maybe Rojava
Support decentralisation process	GNU area (UNISMIS, UNDP, civil society, donors)			Nationwide (UNDP, civil society, donors)
Provide electoral assistance and monitoring	GNU area (UNISMIS)			
Transitional justice (accountability, criminal prosecution, including possibly Assad and other key figures, truth commissions)	• Advocate (NGOs, EU and MSs, individual countries) • Support truth/reconciliation commission and other forms of transitional justice (donors)	Advocate (NGOs, EU and MS, individual countries)	Advocate (NGOs, EU and MSs, individual countries)	Advocate (NGOs, EU and MSs, individual countries)
Human rights monitoring and evidence collection (e.g. IIIM)	Nationwide (NGOs with UNISMIS)	Nationwide (NGOs)	Nationwide (NGOs)	Nationwide (NGOs)

Policy instrument	Fragile Peace	Reconquista	Warlordism	Frozen Conflict
Development				
Reconstruction infrastructure	GNU area ++ (NGOs and private sector in cooperation with government)			Regional: Idlib, south, maybe Rojava (NGOs and private sector in cooperation with government)
Economic recon-struction	GNU area ++ (oil fields in cooper-ation with private sector, income generation pro-jects with NGOs, donors)	Maybe Turkish safe zone (income gen-eration projects) (NGOs, donors)	Income generation projects: local pockets of peace (maybe the Turkish safe zone) (NGOs, donors)	Regional small-scale income gen-eration projects: Idlib, south, maybe Rojava region (NGOs, donors)
Education support	GNU area (NGOs and donors)	Pockets of peace Idlib, Turkish safe zone, maybe Rojava (NGOs and donors)	Turkish safe zone, maybe Rojava, pockets of peace nationwide (NGOs and donors)	Idlib, south, maybe Rojava (NGOs and donors)
Humanitarian				
Providing human-itarian aid (food, water, emergency medical treatment, basic sanitation and hygiene, etc.)	Limited (predom-inantly Idlib, UN, donors and NGOs)	Nationwide (UN, donors and NGOs)	Nationwide (UN, donors and NGOs)	Nationwide (limit-ed, predominantly Idlib and conflict area) (UN, donors and NGOs)
Hosting refugees	X (EUMSs/neigh-bouring countries, supported by UNHCR)	X ++ (EUMSs/ neighbouring countries, support-ed by UNHCR)	X ++ (EUMSs/ neighbouring countries, support-ed by UNHCR)	X (EUMSs/neigh-bouring countries, supported by UNHCR)
Syrian diaspora	Train members of the diaspora and include them in political and reconstruction processes in Syria	Train members of the diaspora in recipient countries	Train members of the diaspora in recipient countries	Train members of the diaspora and include them in regional political and reconstruction processes
Voluntary repatri-ation of refugees and assisting return of IDPs	From Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey (host countries with support of IOM, UNHCR)			From Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey (host countries with support of IOM, UNHCR)
Humanitarian clearance and demining pro-grammes	Nationwide (UNISMIS and NGOs)	Nationwide (NGOs)	Nationwide (NGOs)	Nationwide (NGOs)