

EVENT OUTLINE

SYRIA UNDER ASSAD: CHALLENGES FOR EUROPEAN POLICY

6 February 2018, The Hague

On Tuesday 6 February 2018, Clingendael's Conflict Research Unit will bring together researchers, practitioners, opinion- and policy-makers to discuss key challenges for European policy towards Syria. The event will focus on reconstruction in the absence of reconciliation, and operate under the assumption that the Assad regime will remain in charge of a significant part of the country. The day features an expert meeting until 3pm (by invitation), and a public panel debate from 4-6pm, concluding with a reception.

Parallel to efforts to reduce the level of violence in Syria, there has been increasing talk of how European countries should relate to a Syria under the continued rule of President Assad. This question acquires both urgency and practical meaning when it turns to the matter of support for the country's 'reconstruction' – social, material and perhaps even psychological. After all, alleviating human suffering, mitigating security threats and enabling governance beyond wartime political orders requires massive assistance that Syria's primary international backers probably cannot afford.

Yet, providing such assistance to the Syrian government with its low level of international legitimacy, its poor human rights record and its debt to both Iran and Russia – neither of which are necessarily amicably disposed towards Europe – raises significant political questions. Moreover, urban reconstruction is already taking place in cities such as Homs and Damascus with economic policies of the Syrian government favoring regime loyalists. Finally, a plethora of non- and semi-state actors, both foreign and local, have claimed their space in the Syrian conflict landscape. Their interests and allegiances will affect the future of Syria as polity and community.

From a European perspective, containment of spill-over may be preferable to supporting reconstruction. Or it may not be. In either case, reconstruction-type support will need to be highly politically aware and conflict sensitive – if only to avoid the regime simply appropriating all aid, using it to re-engineer Syria's demography, excluding refugees currently outside of Syria or strengthening its position in the geopolitics of the Middle East – actions which may simply set the scene for the next conflict years down the line.

The event will address the questions of whether European countries should support Syrian reconstruction and if so, how this can be done. It is necessary to consider European policy towards Syria on its own merits because US foreign policy towards the Middle East is currently too uncompromising and belligerent to align with.

Venue:

Hofweg 9e, 3rd floor at the International Development of Law Organization, The Hague

Program

Time	Issue	Topic	Speakers
09:30-15:00 - Expert event (invite only, Chatham House rule)			
09:30-10:00	<i>Welcome and Introduction</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does reconstruction mean? What are the key pillars of current EU/Dutch policy towards Syria? 	Erwin van Veen (Clingendael) Representative of the EU
10:00-12:00	Session 1: <i>Why does reconstruction matter?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are likely humanitarian developments under conditions of no, partial or full reconstruction? What are the prospects for local violence and extremism in different reconstruction scenarios? How can reconstruction efforts affect the position of Syria in the Levant? 	Reinoud Leenders (King's College London) Aron Lund (The Century Foundation) Muriel Asseburg (SWP)
12:00-12:45	Lunch		
12:45-14:15	Session 2: <i>What are pitfalls for reconstruction efforts</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How is the regime reestablishing its political economy and its control over former opposition areas? How does regime consolidation impact on Syrian refugees/IDPs? How are hybrid security actors likely to influence reconstruction? 	Benedetta Berti (NATO) Ibrahim Olabi (Syrian Legal Development Program) Shiraz Maher (ICSR)
14:15-15:00	Session 3 <i>Balancing tensions in approaches to reconstruction</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What approach to reconstruction seems most suitable given the tension between its importance and difficulties? What trade-offs need to be surmounted and how can this be accomplished? 	Samar Batrawi (Clingendael)
16:00-19:00 - Public panel discussion			
16:00-18:00	<i>Key challenges for European policy in Syria</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the key challenges for reconstruction efforts in Syria? How are these challenges affected by recent regional developments? What can European countries do to contribute to humanitarian needs without reinforcing authoritarianism? 	Monika Sie Dhian Ho (Clingendael) - facilitator Steven Heydemann (Brookings) Joseph Daher (Université de Lausanne) Gerard Steeghs (Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
18:00-19:00	Reception		

For further information email Samar Batrawi: sbatrawi@clingendael.org

*The event is made possible by the generous support of the
[Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law](#)*