

Syria at the Center of Power Competition and Counterterrorism

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Even as U.S. policymakers must stay focused on the Assad regime's culpability, they also face a complex web of power dynamics in which Russia, Turkey, Iran, Israel, and other actors are attempting to secure their various interests.

After a decade of civil war in Syria, the core antagonist remains the Assad regime, which in 2011 ruthlessly suppressed peaceful protestors and has since tortured and executed tens of thousands of detainees. The regime also bears responsibility for fostering the growth of the Islamic State, in part by releasing Syrian jihadists at the start of the war. Yet even as U.S. policymakers must stay focused on Assad's culpability, they also face a highly complex web of power dynamics in which Russia, Turkey, Iran, Israel, and other actors are attempting to secure their various interests.

In this Policy Note, expert Aaron Zelin details how the world's counterterrorism and Great Power challenges converge in Syria, and how they must be addressed holistically. To this end, he proposes policies on the diplomatic, humanitarian, legal, economic, and military fronts that can calm the fears of U.S. allies such as Israel, Jordan, and Turkey, and perhaps inspire a more robust opposition, backed by a diverse set of local and diaspora activists. ❖

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