

The Narrowing Field of Syria's Opposition

by [James Bowker \(/experts/james-bowker\)](#), [Andrew J. Tabler \(/experts/andrew-j-tabler\)](#)

Apr 11, 2017

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[James Bowker \(/experts/james-bowker\)](#)

James Bowker, a reporter and Arabic translator for *Syria Direct*, was a 2016–17 research assistant at The Washington Institute.



[Andrew J. Tabler \(/experts/andrew-j-tabler\)](#)

Andrew J. Tabler is the Martin J. Gross Senior Fellow in the Linda and Tony Rubin Program on Arab Politics at The Washington Institute, where he focuses on Syria and U.S. policy in the Levant.



In-Depth Reports

Six years after the outbreak of Syria's civil war, the parties involved, whether aligned with the Assad regime, the Sunni jihadists, or others, have increasingly wielded extreme tactics to pursue noninclusive goals. But a number of entities still emphasize -- to varying degrees -- pluralism, religious tolerance, and individual freedoms. These groups consist primarily of exiles, armed Free Syrian Army formations that defend their communities but still rely on jihadists to take offensive actions, and marginalized opposition blocs tolerated by the Assad regime.

In this essay, fourteenth in a series exploring non-Islamist reform groups post-Arab Spring, James Bowker and Andrew Tabler look into groups with which the United States could possibly partner during and after the war. In making such calculations, U.S. officials will likely have to consider factors beyond inclusive rhetoric, including political organization, viability, and control of territory, in seeking a middle ground between autocrats and extremists.

THE AUTHORS

JAMES BOWKER (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/view/james-bowker>), a reporter and Arabic translator for *Syria Direct*, was a 2016-17 research assistant at The Washington Institute.

ANDREW J. TABLER (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/view/tabler-andrew-j>) is the Martin J. Gross Fellow in the Program on Arab Politics at The Washington Institute, where he focuses on Syria and U.S. policy in the Levant. ❖

Beyond Islamists and Autocrats Essay Series (<http://washin.st/1KXGqh0>)

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Tracking Anti-U.S. Strikes in Iraq and Syria During the Gaza Crisis](#)

Jun 4, 2024

◆
Michael Knights,
Amir al-Kaabi,
Hamdi Malik

[\(/policy-analysis/tracking-anti-us-strikes-iraq-and-syria-during-gaza-crisis\)](#)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[How Sustainable Are Defense and Deterrence Methods in Light of Iran's Attack?](#)

May 6, 2024

◆
Andrew G. Clemmensen

[\(/policy-analysis/how-sustainable-are-defense-and-deterrence-methods-light-irans-attack\)](#)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[A Yom Hashoah Message, from Disgust to Hope](#)

May 5, 2024

◆
Robert Satloff

[\(/policy-analysis/yom-hashoah-message-disgust-hope\)](#)

TOPICS

[Arab & Islamic Politics \(/policy-analysis/arab-islamic-politics\)](#)

[Democracy & Reform \(/policy-analysis/democracy-reform\)](#)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Syria (/policy-
analysis/syria)