

Syria in 60 Seconds

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Oct 29, 2015

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Articles & Testimony

The following summary of the Syrian conflict by Andrew J. Tabler appeared as a sidebar to the October Atlantic Monthly article, '[The Syrian Civil War: What?](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/10/syrian-civil-war-guide-isis/410746/)

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The Syrian Civil War is arguably the worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World War, with over a quarter million killed, roughly the same number wounded or missing, and half of Syria's 22 million population displaced from their homes. But more than that, Syria today is the largest battlefield and generator of Sunni-Shia sectarianism the world has ever seen, with deep implications for the future boundaries of the Middle East and the spread of terrorism.

What started as an attempt by the regime of President Bashar al-Assad to shoot Syria's largest uprising into submission has devolved into a regionalized civil war that has partitioned the country into three general areas in which U.S.-designated terrorist organizations are dominant. In Syria's more diverse west, the Alawite and minority-dominated Assad regime, and a mosaic of Shia militias trained and funded by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC), hold sway. In the center, Sunni moderate, Islamist, and jihadist groups, such as ISIS and the al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra, share control. And in the northeast, the Kurdish-based People's Protection Units (YPG) have united two of three cantons in a bid to expand "Rojava"—Western Kurdistan. As the country has hemorrhaged people, neighboring states have carved out spheres of influence often based on sectarian agendas that tear at the fabric of Syrian society, with Iran (and now Russia) propping up the Assad regime; Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the U.A.E. supporting the Sunni-dominated opposition; and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) supporting the YPG. ❖

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