

## Red Lines: Inside the Battle for Freedom in Syria

by [Mouaz Moustafa \(/experts/mouaz-moustafa\)](#), [Andrea Kalin \(/experts/andrea-kalin\)](#), [Andrew J. Tabler \(/experts/andrew-j-tabler\)](#)

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### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

#### [Mouaz Moustafa \(/experts/mouaz-moustafa\)](#)

Mouaz Moustafa is executive director of the Syrian Emergency Task Force, political director of United for a Free Syria, and a board member of the Coalition for a Democratic Syria.

#### [Andrea Kalin \(/experts/andrea-kalin\)](#)

Andrea Kalin wrote, codirected, and produced Red Lines. She is the founder of Spark Media and executive director of Stone Soup Productions.



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

Andrew J. Tabler is the Martin J. Gross fellow in the Geduld Program on Arab Politics at The Washington Institute, where he focuses on Syria and U.S. policy in the Levant.



Brief Analysis

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**Syrian activist Mouaz Mustafa, Andrea Kalin, producer of the new documentary "Red Lines," and Institute Syria expert Andrew Tabler discuss the battle for freedom in Syria.**

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*On July 9, 2014, Mouaz Moustafa and Andrea Kalin addressed a Policy Forum at The Washington Institute moderated by Andrew Tabler. Moustafa is executive director of the nonprofit Syrian Emergency Task Force. Kalin wrote, codirected, and produced [Red Lines](http://www.redlinesfilm.com), (<http://www.redlinesfilm.com>) a new Syria documentary from Washington-based Spark Media (<http://www.redlinesfilm.com/see-the-film>). Tabler is a senior fellow in the Institute's Program on Arab Politics. The following is a rapporteur's summary of their remarks.*

## ABOUT THE FILM

Released earlier this year, *Red Lines* tells the story of two Syrian activists from very different backgrounds: Razan Shalab al-Sham, the college-educated daughter of a wealthy Syrian family whose life of privilege was turned upside down by the war, and Mouaz Moustafa, born in a Palestinian refugee camp in Damascus and now a key liaison between the rebel Free Syrian Army (FSA) and Western officials. Through revealing frontline footage, codirectors Andrea Kalin and Oliver Lukacs show how both activists have dedicated themselves to saving their country despite a continual lack of outside assistance, whether by smuggling aid into warzones, brokering their own weapons deals, or striving to create enclaves of civil, democratic society in a chaotic land. **[Find more about Red Lines, screenings, and links to watch the film via streaming and download here. \(http://www.redlinesfilm.com/see-the-film/\)](http://www.redlinesfilm.com/see-the-film/)**

## MOUAZ MOUSTAFA

Everyday life in Syria is much worse than even the scenes portrayed in this film, with the people often facing chemical weapons attacks, artillery shelling, barrel bombings, Scud missile strikes, and other violence. Recent photos leaked from Bashar al-Assad's prisons also show civilians who have been tortured to death. This goes on every single day -- the dynamics change, but the fact remains that civilians are being killed all the time in the most horrendous ways.

As for the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), the group became active in Syria before the revolution. The Iraqi *sahwa* (awakening) movement played a very important role in forcing many members of the group's predecessor, al-Qaeda in Iraq, to move into Syria, as the United States supported tribal leaders and local Sunnis who were completely against that brand of extremism.

Today, the key to defeating ISIS in Iraq lies in Syria. The current Iraqi government is loyal to Iran. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki turned his guns not against terrorists, but against his political opponents. This allowed ISIS to roll through northern Iraq, and Sunnis did not stop the group in part due to their anger at Maliki. But in Syria, everybody is against ISIS, including all factions of the FSA and Islamist battalions.

This sentiment also shows that the train has not left the station in terms of supporting the moderate Syrian opposition. Throughout the past three years, many factions have weathered the extremists and the regime without support from the United States. The only thing that can defeat Sunni extremism is Sunni moderates. If Iran, Maliki, and Assad are empowered to fight extremism, then Iranian hegemony in the region will become entrenched, and Sunni extremists will have the greatest recruitment mechanism ever. Indeed, the risks of inaction are much worse than any of the options now on the table. Moderate rebels are not requesting boots on the ground, but they need military support and a no-fly zone. A strategy is needed to both fight the regime -- the biggest magnet for extremists -- and support moderates who want to fight both.

## ANDREA KALIN

The film is not a definitive overview of the conflict, but a story of two protagonists and their experiences, told in order to put a more emotional and human face on the situation and help audiences engage better with ongoing events. Mouaz spoke of a narrative that was not being received in Washington -- a huge gap between what was happening inside Syria and the information that was coming out. What happens offscreen and behind the scenes is just as important as what is onscreen.

The scene in which Syrian women were learning about the electoral process and governance was a particularly transformative moment. It took place in a hotel with Disney characters on the walls, and the women used a little box that carried wine glasses as their ballot box. When one of them said "we are dying to vote," she was saying that literally, not figuratively. Syrian women are fighting for a chance to lead, using a very impressive form of grassroots, bottom-up revolution.

Another powerful moment in the making of the film was when Razan was told about the Holocaust. She had never heard of it, and it came as a complete shock to her.

These and other scenes show why the desperate and vulnerable people of Syria should not be forgotten, and why their stories need to be told. In making the film, it was very difficult not to question the humanity of the international response -- the world is silent, and there is a lack of imagination in its approach to ending the bloodshed. There has to be something in between not doing anything and putting boots on the ground.

## ANDREW TABLER

Sometimes art can best help us make sense of truly chaotic moments, even concerning U.S. policy in the Middle East. The story of Razan and Mouaz is a very useful vehicle for connecting the American public to what used to be just "the Syrian crisis," but is now a conflict truly without borders. The myriad YouTube videos that have flooded out during the uprising make it difficult to deny what has occurred on the ground, yet the outside reaction has at times echoed the silence that greeted the Hama massacre of 1982, when information about events on the ground was drastically harder to obtain.

Many have criticized the Obama administration for not enforcing its redline on the use of chemical weapons -- a decision that is often traced to the notion that Washington did not know the different groups in the Syrian opposition well enough. This movie shows that there were -- and are -- moderates who openly reached out to the United States but were kept at arm's length when asking for anything more than humanitarian assistance. It also seeks to explain why successive officials left the administration after advocating the arming of moderates. Relying on narrow Shiite-based governments in Baghdad and Damascus to shoot their Sunni populations into submission is not a viable long-term solution.

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