

Regional Implications of the War in Syria

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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The civil war between Assad and his opponents has steadily transformed into a global jihad.

Three-and-a-half years into the civil war in Syria, the conflict has become a humanitarian and strategic catastrophe. It threatens to tear the region apart along sectarian lines. It has injected new oxygen into groups and movements driven by violent Islamist ideologies, including but by no means limited to groups formally associated with al-Qaeda. Indeed, we are now faced with a sharp rise in violent extremism from within both the radical Sunni and Shiite camps. As Director of National Intelligence James Clapper recently noted, we can expect an increase in political uncertainty and violence across the region in 2014. There are many reasons this will be the case, not all of which are directly tied to the war in Syria.

Three types of fallout from the war in particular are certain to cause significant spillover of one kind or another. The first is the flow of foreign fighters to Syria from across the Middle East and the impact this dynamic is certain to have on regional stability. The second is the especially pernicious sectarian nature of the conflict at hand. The third is the sharp increase in dangerous macro trends, from refugees and population displacement to poverty, hunger, and lack of adequate health care, that create conditions conducive to violence and instability...

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