

The Potential for an Assad Statelet in Syria

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As the fighting in Syria continues with no signs of decisive victory on the horizon, the Assad regime may decide to abandon parts of the country entirely and form a statelet in the western governorates that remain largely under its control. Such an entity could include as much as 40 percent of Syria's territory and 70 percent of its population. Establishing this statelet and defending it from rebels and al-Qaeda-aligned jihadists could have dire consequences for the Syrian people and the region as a whole, including intractable conflict, forced migration, ethnic/sectarian cleansing, and permanent, restive refugee populations in neighboring countries.

In this Policy Focus, analyst Nicholas Heras assesses the geopolitical, military, and economic implications of such a development, illustrating the various scenarios with detailed maps. As the international community consider negotiations and other options, many Syrians are becoming more fearful of the jihadist threat, more entrenched in their belief that the war is a foreign conspiracy against them, and less likely to support the opposition.

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Nicholas Heras is a Middle East analyst with the Jamestown Foundation and a research associate at the National Defense University. An associate editor for the journal *Fair Observer*, he has significant field experience in all regions of Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan and is a much-sought-after commentator, publishing in *CTC Sentinel*, UPI, CNN.com, *Asia Times*, *Small Wars Journal*, *Long War Journal*, and *Middle East Report*, among other outlets.

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