

# US Attack on Syrian Forces, A Criminal Act of War: Asserting the “Safe Zones”, Perpetuating the War

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Global Research, May 20, 2017

[Land Destroyer Report](#)

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Terrorism](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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*In legal terms, it was both an act of war and criminal. The US military is currently occupying Syrian territory without invitation by the Syrian government and without any form of mandate from the United Nations.*

In geostrategic terms, the United States is attempting to assert itself and its geopolitical strategy of establishing and subsequently expanding “safe zones” inside Syrian territory in a bid to topple the Syrian government, then divide and destroy the Syrian state.

Foreign Policy, a clearinghouse for corporate-financier funded think tank policymakers, in an article titled, “[US Bombs Syria Regime for the First Time](#),” would admit:

The strike showed American commanders are willing to use force to maintain de facto safe zones in the country’s east, where U.S. forces are training local militias to battle the Islamic State and provide security in liberated regions.

While Foreign Policy’s article confirms US intentions of carving out “safe zones” in Syria, it misleads readers regarding the purpose of doing so.

While it claims that these “safe zones” are intended to host training for “local militias to battle the Islamic State,” US intentions to create such zones stretches back long before the threat of the Islamic State was introduced into the conflict.

US policymakers themselves openly admitted the “safe zones” were meant to both perpetuate the conflict and seek a more long-term process of regime change after initial attempts to stampede the government in Damascus out of power failed in 2011.

## Saving Syria: Assessing Options for Regime Change

*Daniel Byman, Michael Dwyer, Kenneth Pollack, and Salmaan Shabbir*

SYRIA IS TRAPPED ON A CRUMBLING PRECIPICE, and however it might fall will entail significant risks for the United States and for the Syrian people.

The brutal regime of Bashar al-Assad is employing its loyal military forces and sectarian thugs to crush the opposition and reassert its tyranny. Even if Bashar falls, Syria may not be out of the woods: an increasingly likely alternative to the current regime is a bloody civil war similar to what we saw in Lebanon, Bosnia, Congo, and most recently in Iraq. The horrors of such a war might even exceed the brutal reassertion of Assad's control, and would cause spillover into Syria's neighbors—Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel—that could be disastrous for them and for American interests in the Middle East.<sup>1</sup>

But the unrest in Syria, which is now entering its second year, also offers some important opportunities, ones that would come from the fall of the regime of Bashar al-Assad, whose family has ruled the country with an iron grip for over forty years. Syria is both older and more important ally in the Arab world, and the Iranian regime has doubled down on Assad, providing him with financial aid and military support to shore up his regime. Assad's departure would deal a significant blow to Tehran, further isolating it at a time when it has few friends in the region or the world. In addition, Damascus is so close to its hostility toward Israel, and Assad's regime is also a longtime supporter of terrorist groups like Hezbollah and Hamas, and has at times aided al-Qaeda terrorists and former regime

elements in Iraq. The regime's collapse, therefore, could have significant benefits for the United States and its allies in the region.

Actually ousting Assad, however, will not be easy. Although the Obama administration has for months called for Assad to go, every policy option to remove him is flawed, and some could even make the situation worse—seemingly a recipe for inaction. Doing nothing, however, means standing by while Assad murders his own people, and Syria plunges into civil war and risks becoming a failed state. Already the violence is spreading: as of March 2012, at least 8,800 Syrians have died and thousands more have been arrested and remained in custody to supply the regime. At the same time, Syria is fragmenting. The Syrian opposition remains divided, and the Free Syrian Army is more a brand than a meaningful, unified force. Al-Qaeda is urging fighters to join the fray in Syria, and sectarian killings and atrocities are growing. Should the violence continue to intensify, Syrian neighbors may increase their meddling, and instability could spread, further weakening already-fragile neighbors like Iraq and Lebanon.

So to protect U.S. interests, Assad cannot triumph. But a failed Syria, one wracked by civil war, would be just as bad. Thus, U.S. policy must walk this tightrope, trying to remove Assad, but doing so in a way that keeps Syria as intact as possible, capable of policing its borders and creating order at home. At the end of the day, however, removing Assad may not be viable.

A March 2012 Brookings Institution paper titled, “[Middle East Memo #21: Saving Syria: Assessing Options for Regime Change](#)” (PDF), proposes the concept of “safe zones” or “safe-havens” not to fight the yet-to-be invented Islamic State, but specifically to assist US-backed regime change. It claims (emphasis added):

An alternative is for diplomatic efforts to focus first on how to end the violence and how to gain humanitarian access, as is being done under Annan's leadership. **This may lead to the creation of safe-havens** and humanitarian corridors, which would have to be backed by limited military power. This would, of course, fall short of U.S. goals for Syria and could preserve Assad in power. **From that starting point, however, it is possible that a broad coalition with the appropriate international mandate could add further coercive action to its efforts.**

A 2015 Brookings paper titled, “[Deconstructing Syria: Towards a regionalized strategy for a confederal country](#)” would elaborate on the nature of these zones, not as bases for fighting terrorism – but as a means of incrementally dividing and literally “deconstructing” Syria as a unified nation-state (emphasis added):

The end-game for these zones would not have to be determined in advance. The interim goal might be a confederal Syria, with several highly autonomous zones and a modest (eventual) national government. The confederation would likely require support from an international peacekeeping force, if this arrangement could ever be formalized by accord. **But in the short term, the ambitions would be lower—to make these zones defensible and governable, to help provide relief for populations within them, and to train and equip more recruits so that the zones could be stabilized and then gradually expanded.**

It would also elaborate regarding the role the Islamic State specifically plays in all of this –

not as an enemy to be defeated – but as a pawn to be used against the Syrian government:

The idea would be to help moderate elements establish reliable safe zones within Syria once they were able. **American, as well as Saudi and Turkish and British and Jordanian and other Arab forces would act in support, not only from the air but eventually on the ground via the presence of special forces as well.** The approach would benefit from Syria's open desert terrain which could allow creation of buffer zones that could be monitored for possible signs of enemy attack through a combination of technologies, patrols, and other methods that outside special forces could help Syrian local fighters set up.

**Were Assad foolish enough to challenge these zones, even if he somehow forced the withdrawal of the outside special forces, he would be likely to lose his air power in ensuing retaliatory strikes by outside forces, depriving his military of one of its few advantages over ISIL. Thus, he would be unlikely to do this.**

Here, not only is the focus on tempting the Syrian government into an attack to justify wider direct conflict between US and Syrian forces, Brookings policymakers openly use the prospect of stripping away tools the Syrian government is using to fight the Islamic State as leverage while the US invades and occupies larger stretches of Syrian territory.

**B. THE OPPOSITION FORCES WILL TRY TO USE THE IRAQI TERRITORY AS A SAFE HAVEN FOR ITS FORCES TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE SYMPATHY OF THE IRAQI BORDER POPULATION, MEANWHILE TRYING TO RECRUIT FIGHTERS AND TRAIN THEM ON THE IRAQI SIDE, IN ADDITION TO HARBORING REFUGEES (SYRIA).**

**C. IF THE SITUATION UNRAVELS THERE IS THE POSSIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING A DECLARED OR UNDECLARED SALAFIST PRINCIPALITY IN EASTERN SYRIA (HASAKA AND DER ZOR), AND THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT THE SUPPORTING POWERS TO THE OPPOSITION WANT, IN ORDER TO ISOLATE THE SYRIAN REGIME, WHICH IS CONSIDERED THE STRATEGIC DEPTH OF THE SHIA EXPANSION (IRAQ AND IRAN).**

**B. THE SALAFIST, THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD, AND AQI ARE THE MAJOR FORCES DRIVING THE INSURGENCY IN SYRIA.**

**C. THE WEST, GULF COUNTRIES, AND TURKEY SUPPORT THE OPPOSITION; WHILE RUSSIA, CHINA, AND IRAN SUPPORT THE REGIME.**

(b)(1) Sec. 1.4 (c); (b)(1) Sec. 1.4 (d)

The use of the Islamic State as a pawn against the Syrian government should come as no surprise and is hardly a “conspiracy theory.” The US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) itself in 2012 [would publish a memo \(PDF\)](#) detailing specifically what a prescribed “Salafist” (Islamic) “principality” (State) would be used for by the US and its allies:

If the situation unravels there is the possibility of establishing a declared or undeclared Salafist principality in eastern Syria (Hasaka and Der Zor), and this

is exactly what the supporting powers to the opposition want, in order to isolate the Syrian regime, which is considered the strategic depth of the Shia expansion (Iraq and Iran).

The DIA memo then explains exactly who the supporters powers are – as well as who the principality's enemies would be:

The West, Gulf countries, and Turkey support the opposition; while Russia, China, and Iran support the regime.

America's strategy in Syria is an admittedly more drawn out process than was used against Afghanistan in 2001, Iraq in 2003, and Libya in 2011. All three nations are now destabilized and virtual breeding grounds for terrorism, conflict, instability, and human catastrophe – cautionary examples of Syria's fate should US foreign policy "succeed" there as well.

With the recent strike, the US proves that it will continue its illegal, unwarranted aggression in Syria until it either topples the Syrian government and succeeds in transforming the nation into yet another failed state amid its growing collection of global military interventions, or until the US is stopped by sufficient deterrence by Syria and its allies in Moscow and Tehran.

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