

Why Syria is Winning: Advancing towards a Strategic Victory that will transform the Middle East?

By [Prof. Tim Anderson](#)

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In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

Syria is winning. Despite ongoing bloodshed and serious economic pressure, Syria is advancing steadily towards a military and strategic victory that will transform the Middle East. There is clear evidence that Washington's plans - whether for 'regime change', for rendering the state dysfunctional or for dismembering the country on sectarian lines - have failed.

That failure will fatally wound the US dream, announced a decade ago by Bush junior, for a subservient 'New Middle East'. Syria's victory is a combination of coherent popular support for the national army, in face of a vicious sectarian Islamists (*takfiris*), firm backing by key allies, and fragmentation of the international forces lined up against them.

The economic hardships, including regular blackouts, are now worse but have not broken the Syrian people's will to resist. The government ensures basic foods are affordable and maintains education, health, sports, cultural and other services. A string of formerly hostile states and UN agencies are resuming their relations with Syria. An improved security situation, the recent big power agreement with Iran and other favourable diplomatic moves are all signs that the Axis of Resistance has strengthened.

You wouldn't know much of this by reading the western media, which has lied persistently about the character of the conflict and developments in the crisis. Key features of that deception have been to hide NATO's backing for the *takfiri* groups, yet trumpet their advances and ignore the Syrian Army roll-backs. In fact, these western-backed terrorists have made no real strategic advance since a flood of foreign fighters helped them take parts of northern Aleppo, back in mid-2012.

In my second visit to Syria during the crisis, in July 2015, I could see how security had improved around the major cities. In my first visit in December 2013, although NATO's throat-cutters had been ejected from much of Homs and Qsayr, they were in the ancient village of Maloula and along the Qalamoun Mountains, as well as attacking the road south to Sweida. This year we were able to travel freely by road from Sweida to Damascus to Homs to Latakia, with just one minor detour around Harasta. In late 2013 there was daily mortaring of eastern Damascus; this year it was far less common. The army seems to control 90% of the heavily populated areas.

Fact check one: there never were any 'moderate rebels'. A genuine political reform movement was displaced by a Saudi-backed Islamist insurrection, through March-April 2011. In the first few months of the crisis, from Daraa to Homs, key armed groups like the Farouq brigade were extremists backed by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, who practised public atrocities

and blew up hospitals, using genocidal slogans and practising sectarian ethnic cleansing (1). Syrians these days call them all 'Daesh' (ISIL) or just 'mercenaries', not bothering too much with the different brand names. The recent statement by 'moderate rebel' leader Lamia Nahas that Syria's 'minorities are evil and must be disposed of', just as Hitler and the Ottomans disposed of minorities (2), only underlines that fact. The character of the armed conflict has always been between a confrontation between an authoritarian but pluralist and socially inclusive state, and Saudi-style sectarian Islamists, acting as proxy armies for the big powers.

Fact check two: almost all the atrocities blamed on the Syrian Army have been committed by western-backed gangs, as part of their strategy to attract deeper western intervention. That includes the discredited chemical weapons claims (3) and the collateral damage claims of the so-called 'barrel bombing'. US journalist Nir Rosen wrote back in 2012, 'Every day the opposition gives a death toll, usually without any explanation ... Many of those reported killed are in fact dead opposition fighters but ... described in reports as innocent civilians killed by security forces' (4). Those opposition reports are still relied on by partisan groups such as Amnesty International (US) and Human Rights Watch, to bolster the war propaganda. The Syrian Army has indeed executed captured terrorists, and the secret police continue to detain and mistreat those suspected of collaborating with those terrorists. But this is an army which enjoys very strong public support. The Islamist gangs, on the other hand, openly boast of their atrocities and have minimal public support.

Fact check three: while there is a terrorist 'presence' in large parts of Syria, neither Daesh/ISIL nor any other armed group 'controls' much of the populated Syrian territory. Western agencies (such as Janes and ISW) regularly confuse presence with control. Notwithstanding the Daesh/ISIL offensives in Daraa, Idlib and Eastern Homs, the heavily populated areas of Syria are under noticeably stronger army control than they were in 2013. Only a few areas have been held for months or years. In any sustained confrontation, the Army generally wins; but it is under pressure and not infrequently makes a tactical retreat, because it is fighting on dozens of fronts.

The Syrian Army has tightened its cordon around northern Aleppo, Douma and Harasta, and has had recent victories in Hasaka, Idlib and Daraa. With Hezbollah forces the Army has virtually eliminated Daesh/ISIL and its squabbling partners from the Qalamoun mountains, along the border with Lebanon.

Despite years of mass terrorism and western sanctions the Syrian state is functioning surprisingly well. In July 2015 our group visited large sports centres, schools and hospitals. Millions of Syrian children attend school and hundreds of thousands still study in mostly fee-free universities. Unemployment, shortages and power blackouts plague the country. Takfiri groups have targeted hospitals for demolition since 2011. They also regularly attack power plants, leading to government rationing of electricity, until the system is back up. There are serious shortages and widespread poverty but, despite the war, everyday life goes on.

For example, there was controversy in 2014 over building the 'Uptown' complex in New Sham, a large satellite city outside Damascus. The facility comprises restaurants, shops, sports facilities and, at the centre, children's rides and other entertainment. 'How could the state spend so much money on this, when so many people were suffering from the war?' one side of the argument ran. On the other side it was said that life goes on and families have to live their lives. After Ramadan, during Eid, we saw thousands of families making use

of this very child-friendly complex.

Security procedures have become 'normal'. Frequent army checkpoints are met with remarkable patience. Syrians know they are for their security, especially against the car and truck bombs used by the Islamists. Soldiers are efficient but human, often exchanging friendly chat with the people. Most families have members in the Army and many have lost loved ones. Syrians do not endure curfews or cower from soldiers, as so many did under the US-backed fascist dictatorships of Chile and El Salvador, in the past.

In the north, the Mayor of Latakia told us that this province of 1.3 million now has over three million, having absorbed displaced people from Aleppo, Idlib and other northern areas affected by incursions of sectarian terrorists. Most are in free or subsidised government housing, with family and friends, renting or in small businesses. We saw one group of about 5,000, many from Hama, at Latakia's large sports complex. In the south, Sweida has been hosting 130,000 displaced families from the Daraa area, doubling the population of that province. Yet Damascus holds the greater part of the six million internally displaced people and, with a little help from the UNHCR, the government and army are the main ones organising their care. The western media only tells you about the refugee camps in Turkey and Jordan, facilities mostly controlled by the armed groups.

The 'regime attacking civilians' or 'indiscriminately' bombing civilian areas only has a basis in the Islamist propaganda on which much of the western media relies. The fact that, after three years, Syrian planes and artillery have not flattened hold-out areas like Jobar, Douma and parts of northern Aleppo, gives the lie to claims against the Army. You can be almost certain that the next time western media say 'civilians' are being killed by 'indiscriminate' Syrian government bombing, it is the Islamist sources themselves who are under attack.

This war is being fought on the ground, building to building, with many army casualties. Many Syrians we spoke to said they wished the government would indeed flatten these ghost towns, saying that the only civilians left there are the families of and collaborators with the extremist groups. The Syrian Government proceeds with greater caution.

Regional states see what is coming, and have begun to rebuild ties with Syria. Washington still pushes its chemical weapons lies (in face of the independent evidence), but lost its stomach for any major escalation back in late 2013, after the confrontation with Russia. There is still much sabre rattling (5), but it is noteworthy that Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), enemies of Syria just a little while back, are now normalising their diplomatic relations with Damascus.

The UAE, perhaps the most 'flexible' of the Gulf monarchies, but also linked by Vice President Joe Biden to support for Daesh/ISIL (6), has its own worries. It recently arrested dozens of Islamists over a plot to turn the absolutist monarchy into an absolutist caliphate (7). Egypt, back in military hands after a short-lived Muslim Brotherhood Government that wanted to join in the attacks on Syria, is now dealing with its own sectarian terrorism, from that same Brotherhood. The largest of Arab countries now defends the territorial integrity of Syria and backs (at least verbally) the Syrian campaigns against terrorism. Egyptian analyst Hassan Abou Taleb calls this message 'a condemnation and rejection of Turkey's unilateral moves' against Syria (8).

The Erdogan Government tried to position Turkey at the head of a Muslim Brotherhood region, but has lost allies, is often at odds with its anti-Syrian partners and faces dissent at

home. Washington has tried to use the separatist Kurds against both Baghdad and Damascus, while Turkey sees them as key enemies and the Saudi-backed Islamists slaughter them as 'apostate' Muslims. For their part, the Kurdish communities have enjoyed greater autonomy and acceptance under Iran and Syria.

Washington's recent agreement with Iran is an important development, as the Islamic Republic remains the most important regional ally of secular Syria and a firm opponent of Saudi-style Islamists. Affirmation of Iran's role in the region upsets the Saudis and Israel, but bodes well for Syria. All commentators see a diplomatic jockeying for position after the Iran deal and - despite Iran's recent exclusion from a meeting between Russian, US and Saudi foreign ministers - there can be little doubt that Iran's hand has been strengthened in regional affairs. An unusual meeting between Syria's intelligence chief, Brigadier-General Ali Mamlouk, and the Saudi Defence Minister, Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (9), also shows that the Syrian Government has resumed direct discussions with the major sponsor of terrorism in the region.

Syria is winning because the Syrian people have backed their army against sectarian provocations, mostly fighting their own battles against NATO and Gulf Monarchy sponsored multi-national terrorism. Syrians, including most devout Sunni Muslims, will never accept that head-chopping, vicious and sectarian perversion of Islam promoted by the Gulf monarchies.

Syria's victory will have wider implications. It spells an end to Washington's roller coaster of 'regime change' across the region, from Afghanistan to Iraq to Libya. Out of the death and misery caused by this dirty war we are seeing the emergence of a stronger 'Axis of Resistance'. Syria's victory will also be that of Iran and of the Lebanese Resistance, led by Hezbollah. Further, the conflict has helped built significant measures of cooperation with Iraq. The gradual incorporation of Baghdad into this Axis will seal the humiliating defeat of plans for a US-Israeli-Saudi dominated 'New Middle East'. This regional unity comes at a terrible cost, but it is coming, nonetheless.

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