Syria and the Least Bad Option: Dealing with Governance, Economics, and the Human Dimension

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There is no realistic way to approach the tragedy in Syria without choosing the least bad options among the uncertain and unfavorable approaches available. The time has passed to debate whether there was point when moderate rebel factions could have won with limited outside US intervention. One cannot debate that situation now. As the situation stands now, the rebels are too divided and have too many extremist elements, “the center cannot hold,” and the rebels face an Assad regime that has too much outside support from Hezbollah, Iran, and Russia, and has recovered its ability to use to force.

There are no “good” options in Syria at the present time, and the best we can hope for is finding a “least bad” option to accept. Much of the focus on finding the least bad option now centers on either peace negotiations or finding a way for rebel factions to win at the military level that will be moderate enough to win some form of international acceptance. This may still be a hope, but it is not a short-term probability. Even if it was possible, Syria would then face years of reconstruction.

Barring some sudden massive divisions within the Assad regime, Syria faces a truly grim future. Syria is divided between an Assad controlled west where the regime has control over the ports and urban areas in the northeast, most of Damascus, and fighting to gain control of Aleppo and other urban areas. This is a campaign based on starvation, economic intimidation, and terror weapons including barrels bombs. No suspect or rebel area is safe, and the Assad regime seems to feel it is on the path to victory – if not over all of Syria, over the East and developed urban center.

Divided rebel forces – whose most extremist Jihadist factions have spent more time fighting each other and moderate elements than Assad – control a fragmented East and Syria’s oil fields. So far, it is questionable whether they can either hold or govern their most critical and populated gains – although some kind of de facto separation of Syria into two armed areas still seems likely. Some kind of demarcation line and ceasefire may or may not be possible, and may or may not be honored, but all sides seem likely to keep building up their forces and importing arms for another round – or rounds of fighting.

Every effort must still be made to find some form of solution that will end the fighting and unify the country around a regime Syria’s people feel they can trust, but it is far from clear that this is a real world possibility. This makes it equally important to consider what will happen in the country remains split between West and East for at least several more years, and the impact of prolonged fighting and/or division of the country on Syria’s people and its future.

The civil war has disrupted every element of Syrian society in a state that suffered from poor governance, a weak economic base, and intense population pressures even before the civil war began. It is now projected to have displaced a third of its population or driven it out of the country by the end
of 2014. Massive numbers of people have lost their homes, businesses, and jobs. About one third of Syria’s population are children, many of whom have lost access to education or normal social development for the past three years, and with no end in sight. These problems will have serious implications going forward.

Even if the country united tomorrow, it might well take at least a decade to overcome the impact of the civil war, and then only if Syria had effective plans to rebuild its structure of governance and its economy and actually meet the needs of its people. If the civil war continues to divide the country, a different kind of relief and aid effort will be needed to deal with the split of the nation into East and West, and what may become lasting or permanent refugee colonies outside its borders.

**Failures in Foundation of Governance and Development Date Back to Before the Syria’s Civil War**

Syria’s problems began decades before its civil war and Syria had a poor base to build upon when the civil war began. Even if one ignores its human rights record, reporting by reputable international agencies make it clear that Syria was terribly governed, its economy was critically mishandled, and it faced massive population pressures in the years before the current fighting began.

- The World Bank governance indicators gave Syria one of the worst rankings in to world in accountability, and sharply declining and dismal ranking in political stability and absence of violence, a poor ranking in the effectiveness of governance, poor ranking in regulatory capability, poor ranking in rule of law and a very poor ranking in control of corruption.  
- The Syrian budget deficit was serious in 2011. Syria spent $12.6 billion with revenues of only $2 billion in 2012. It dropped from $10.3 billion in exports on 2011 to only $3.9 billion in2012, and it had $10.8 billion in imports in 2012.
- Syria ranked 168th out of 177th country in the Transparency International perceptions of corruption indicators.
- The CIA estimated that Syria’s per capita income was only $5,100, ranking 156th in the world with 15%+ direct unemployment before the civil war took hold, and 12% of its people below the poverty line.
- Syria only ranked 147th in the world in ease of doing business in 2011 but had a moderate ranking in World Development Indicators – largely because of higher educational standards and life expectancy, but this ranking was heavily skewed around conditions in its major cities, and far less progress was taking place in rural areas in the West and any area in the East.
- By June 2013, its ranking in the ease of doing business have dropped to 165th out of 189 countries.
- Syria was a nation under acute population pressure. The US Census Bureau estimates that its total population was 3.5 million in 1950, 7.4 million in 1975, 16.5 million in 2000, 22.5 million in 2013, and would reach 25.5 million in2025 and 33.7 million in 2050 – roughly ten times what it was in 1950.
- Some 34% of Syria’s population was 14 years of age or younger and more than 54% 24 years of age or younger, The median age was 23 and the dependency ratio of those outside the work force even before any of the current refugee problems began was 67%.
• Some 257,000 males and 245,000 females reached job age each year in a country with only 5.3 million adults in its work force in 2011 and Syria’s economy shrank by 2.3% in 2011 – long before the civil war began to have a critical effect. ix

• Poverty, water issues, and shortages of land had made Syria 56% urbanized, creating large areas of urban poverty and slums, with urbanization growing at 2.4% a year. Some 7.6 million people out of some 22 million lived in four cites – several of which have since been key areas in the fighting -- Aleppo had a population of 2.985 million; DAMASCUS (capital) had 2.527 million; Homs had 1.276 million; and Hamah had 854,000 (2009). x

• Syria was deeply divided and geographically split on religious and ethnic lines. The CIA estimated that its population divided sharply on religious lines: Sunni Muslim (Islam - official) 74%, other Muslim (including Alawite and Druze) 16%, Christian (various denominations) 10%, Jewish (tiny communities in Damascus, Al Qamishli, and Aleppo).

• Syria also divided on ethnic lines -- Arab 90.3%, Kurds, Armenians, and other 9.7% -- with a large Kurdish enclave with uncertain citizenship status in the northeast. xi

• Syria ranked 116th in the world in the human development indicators based on health, education, income, and life expectancy – a poor to moderate ranking on a global basis. xii

• Water was already an issue, but reporting is uncertain and often contradictory. Water quality and supply in urban areas was normally been adequate but varied with rainfall. Water supplies were less adequate in rural and poorer areas and agricultural output in crops like wheat varied sharply with levels of annual rains.

These rankings, trends, and numbers need to be kept in mind in assessing the options for Syria’s future. Syria has now had no real governance or economic development in the classic sense for nearly three years. The regime and rebels are using terror and targeting and threaten civilians in a war of attrition. The education of the children even in relatively safe areas has been badly affected, and many children in violent areas, children who are internally displaced, or children who are refugees outside the country have lost some three years of education.

Syria’s mix of housing, businesses, jobs and social structures was already under serious stress when the civil war began in 2011, Three years of civil conflict have greatly increased these problems. Moreover, more than a million young men and women have reached the age where they should enter the work force since 2011, while the work force has shrunk badly and there has been little job creation of any kind outside the profession of violence.

This will present critical problems in the future even if Syria has a popular and competent government committed to serving all of its people, and this does not seem a probability.

If Assad or a group of Sunni Jihadist extremist should actually win, it is difficult to see how post-civil war governance and development would not be even worse and how they could attract outside aid in anything like the numbers required. If Assad wins, Syrians will live in climate of authoritarian control under a leader and elite whose main goal will be regime survival and allocating resources to those who help it survive.
If the rebels win, it is unclear that they will be unified enough or competent enough to govern, and there is a serious risk that religious extremists will try to force their beliefs and rules on Syria’s people and take revenge against its Alawites.

Any form of stalemate is going to leave a divided country that had an extremely weak structure of governance and an uncertain economy before the civil war began in late 2011. Any form of rebel victory risk creating the same deep political and social divisions as in Libya, Egypt, Tunisia, and Iraq, and bring the same mix of factions with no real experience in governance or peaceful politics to power.

Outside governments and aid groups need to start planning now to deal with these issues, create a capability to provide effective economic planning and aid creating more effective governance, help Syria in dealing with what may be armed partition and help both Syria and its neighbors deal with the lasting impact of its massive number of displaced persons and millions of refugees that may take years to return – if ever. Such planning, however, faces massive challenges because of the number of Syrians displaced within Syria and the burden posed by Syrian refugees on neighboring states.

The Impact of Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees

Some estimates sharply underestimate the scale of the problems Syria faces by focusing on casualties – which now seem to include some 130,000 to 145,000 dead plus three to five times that in wounded. Other estimates that do focus on live human beings sometimes only count registered refugees outside the country. The real human problem is far greater.

Displaced Persons Inside Syria

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR Country Operations profile for refugees in Syria, 2014 notes that internally displaced persons present a major crisis by themselves, and one that grows with every new battle, every regime terror attack, and every fight between rebel factions.xiii

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has estimated that, by the end of 2013, 6.5 million of Syria’s 22 million population will be affected and in need of humanitarian assistance, including 4.25 million internally displaced. Of the 4.25 million IDPs, UNHCR will assist up to 3.3 million (660,000 families) in all sectors. Overall planning concerning internal displacement has been made with the assumption that Syrian refugees and IDPs will not return to their home areas in significant numbers in 2014.

UNHCR estimates that the number of internally displaced persons in Syria had already reached 3,800,000 – plus some 150,000 stateless persons from Iraq and other countries. It estimated that this total would rise to 4,250,000 in 2014, plus 120,000 stateless persons, raising the total over 4,400,000, equaling rough 20% of Syria’s entire population. It also estimated that as of mid-2013, some 1,888,000 more Syrians were refugees outside Syria – raising the total population of concern to 6,237,000 as of mid-2013 – a number that may well be at least 500,000-700,000 larger by the end of 2014.xiv

Syrian Refugees in Jordan

As for Syrian refugees outside the country, the UNHCR Country Operations profile for refugees in Jordan, 2014 estimates that, xv
Syrians have rapidly become the largest refugee population of concern to UNHCR in Jordan, with over 500,000 individuals registered or awaiting registration by August 2013, most of whom come from Deraa. Aside from 120,000 Syrians hosted in the Zaatari camp, the vast majority of Syrians reside in non-camp settings, predominantly in the north. Nonetheless, Syrians have been registered in all governorates across Jordan, notably Amman with 13 per cent. Based on current trends, UNHCR expects the numbers of Syrian refugees fleeing to Jordan to increase, with the potential risk of a larger, sudden influx. Push factors include generalized and targeted violence, in addition to a public service breakdown in most areas of Syria and increasing prices for fuel and food.

As of March 2013, Jordan was hosting nearly 30,000 Iraqi refugees; the majority of whom are from Baghdad. Third-country resettlement is expected to remain the primary durable solution for Iraqis in 2014 with some 1,500 departures, while some 300 Iraqis are expected to return to Iraq through UNHCR’s voluntary repatriation programme. The refugees remaining in Jordan will continue to require significant levels of support.

The UNHCR report indicated that the number of Syrian refugees in Jordan had risen to 1,255,000 by the end of 2013, out of a total refugee population of 1,284,000, and Syrian refugees made up 20% of Jordan’s population of 6,482,000. The number of Syrians was estimated to rise to 1,410,000 by the end of 2014, out of a total refugee population of 1,438,000. This burden not only presents massive problems in terms of the basic conditions of life and any hope for the future to Syrians, it presents a critical problem to Jordan in terms of employment, water, and housing and political stability.

**Syrian Refugees in Lebanon**

Jordan is only one of two neighboring countries facing massive challenges. The UNHCR *Country Operations profile for refugees in Lebanon, 2014* reports that, xvi

> Previously strong economic growth rates in Lebanon have been negatively affected by political instability, security incidents and the effects of the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria)…The growing number of Syrian refugees and the effects of their presence on the political, economic and social stability, as well as on the labor market and infrastructure, are a major concern.

The majority of people of concern planned for in 2014 under the Lebanon operation are Syrians fleeing the conflict in Syria. By August 2013, the number of Syrians registered and pending registration with UNHCR stood at over 700,000. Based on the situation in Syria and current arrival trends, it is expected that up to 1 million Syrian refugees may be residing in Lebanon by December 2013. By the end of 2014, the Syrian refugee population could reach 1.5 million.

Of the more than 8,000 (non-Syrian and non-Palestinian) refugees and asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR, Iraqis represent 87 per cent and the remaining originate from Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Somalia and Sudan. Based on trends of 2013, and despite the situation in Iraq, the total number of non-Palestinian and non-Syrian refugees is projected to continue to decrease in 2014…Exact figures on statelessness are not known, but could be as high as 200,000 according to some academic studies.

The report indicated that the number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon had risen to 1,000,000 by the end of 2013, out of a total refugee population of 1,009,000 and Syrian refugees made up 24% of Lebanon’s population of 4,132,000. The number of Syrians was estimated to rise to 1,500,000 by the end of 2014, out of a total refugee population of 1,510,000. This burden not only presents massive problems in
terms of the basic conditions of life and any hope for the future to Syrians, it presents an even more critical problem to Lebanon than to Jordan in terms of employment, water, and housing -- and potentially in terms of political stability.

**Syrian Refugees in Turkey**

Syrian refugee pressure on Turkey and Iraq is more limited relative to the overall size of their populations and economies, but it still all too still serious, the UNHCR *Country Operations profile for refugees in Turkey, 2014* reports that, xvii

Since the beginning of the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) in 2011, over 500,000 Syrians have sought protection in Turkey, according to Government estimates. The temporary protection regime established by the Government in October 2011 is likely to continue throughout 2014, given the ongoing protection needs of Syrian refugees. There are currently 21 camps in 10 provinces hosting more than 201,000 Syrian refugees. Another 300,000-400,000 Syrians are residing in Turkish cities, mostly in the provinces of Hatay, Gaziantep and Sanliurfa. By the end of 2013, it is estimated that 1 million Syrians will have arrived in Turkey -- approximately 300,000 in camps and 700,000 outside camps. This will put further pressure on Turkey and the international community in their efforts to assist those in camps and to register and ensure access to essential services for those refugees residing outside the camps.

UNHCR has provided core relief items to support the Turkish authorities in addressing the needs of the Syrian refugees. The Office will continue to assist the Turkish authorities with material and technical assistance to help manage the increase in arrivals and growing numbers of non-camp refugees, as well as to improve the registration of refugees to ensure that people with special needs are identified early and referred to the appropriate State mechanisms.

Turkey has also seen an unprecedented surge in the number of asylum applications from other nationalities over the past 24 months. The number of non-Syrian asylum-seekers and refugees has exceeded 50,000 individuals, adding to the strain on the country's protection environment. UNHCR continues to support protection measures for this non-Syrian population of concern through reception, registration, refugee status determination (RSD), durable solutions and assistance activities.

The emergency response by the authorities to the influx of Syrians has been exemplary. In 2014-2015, it is anticipated that the hospitality and support provided for Syrian and non-Syrian refugees hosted in Turkey will remain significant, including access to health services, psychosocial counselling, education, and legal and physical protection.

The same report indicated that the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey had risen to 1,000,000 by the end of 2013, out of a total refugee population of 1,054,000 or 1.2% of Turkey’s population of 80,694,000. The number of Syrians was estimated to rise to 1,300,000 by the end of 2014, out of a total refugee population of 1,373,000.

This refugee burden not only presents another series of problems in terms of the basic conditions of life and any hope for the future for Syrians, it presents another case where it posed major problems to the host country in terms of employment, water, and housing -- and potentially in terms of political stability. This latter risk was further compounded by Turkey’s tensions with its own Kurds.
Syrian Refugees in Iraq

The UNHCR *Country Operations profile for refugees in Lebanon, 2014* reports that, xviii

Iraq is not only receiving large numbers of Syrian refugees, but is also seeing the return of many Iraqi refugees, particularly from Syria. Often these returnees cannot go back to their places of origin, leading to new secondary displacement inside Iraq.

With the growing number of Syrian refugees putting additional strains on local infrastructure and essential services, which were already significantly weakened by the years of war and instability, access to basic services for the Iraqi population itself remains problematic. Stagnant socio-economic development further affects daily life in Iraq, while institutional capacity remains limited. These conditions hamper the ability of internally displaced people to return home. With this context, UNHCR and its partners deliver assistance and protection to vulnerable groups which are often located in remote areas.

In 2014, the main populations of concern in Iraq will include: refugees and asylum-seekers from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey who are mostly of Kurdish origin, and fled over a decade ago; Palestinians who were granted asylum by the previous regime, most of whom live in camps, settlements and urban areas across Iraq, mainly in the Kurdistan Region, but also in Baghdad and other central governorates; Syrians, the majority of whom currently reside in the Kurdistan Region or in Anbar Governorate; and growing numbers of Iraqi refugees returning to Iraq from neighbouring countries. There are approximately 1 million IDPs and 110,000 stateless people in Iraq who will be eligible for assistance from UNHCR.

The same report indicated that the number of Syrian refugees in Iraq had risen to 350,000 by the end of 2013, out of a total refugee population of 1,592,000 and that Syrian refugees were equal to 1% of Iraq’s population of 31,858,000. The number of Syrian refugees was estimated to rise to 500,000 by the end of 2014, out of a total refugee population of 1,642,000.

This burden again presents problems in the conditions of life and hope for the future for the Syrians involved, Syrians. It also presents another case where it poses major problems to the host country in terms of employment, water, and housing -- and potentially in terms of political stability. This risk to political stability is compounded in Iraq’s case by the fact the Sunni and Shi’ite volunteers move through Iraq and Turkey to fight for the two sides in Syria, and the build-up of Sunni Jihadist factions in Syria has led movements like AQI-ISIS to conduct more attacks in western Iraq and occupy cities like Fallujah and Ramadi.

*The Impact on Syria’s Least Bad Options*

If the UNHCR is right -- and at present it estimates seem to be conservative -- the total human impact by the end of 2014 will go far beyond some 170,000 to 190,000 dead. The impact on the living -- at least one-third of which are children -- will include the uncountable threat to the families that have stayed in conflict areas since the civil war began.

By the end of 2014, it will on 4,400,000 live displaced persons in Syria, 1,410,000 refugees in Jordan, 1,500,000 in Lebanon, 1,300,000 in Turkey, and 500,000 more in Iraq. The total number of Syrians displaced in Syria, or living outside it as refugees will total well over 8,000,000 or some 35% of Syria’s population.
Given the failures of both diplomacy and war to date, it seems likely to Syria will remain divided between the Assad controlled west and a mix of competing rebel factions in the east for at least several more years. This means planning aid based on a country that will still be divided and in some form of civil in some form of civil war for at least two to three more years, and possibly indefinitely into the future.

It means dealing with a world in which some nations –like Russia and Iran – may provide substantial aid to the Assad regime, but probably nothing like the volume of aid needed to rebuild the Assad controlled portion. Much of this aid will also be military and do little more than make the overall plight of Syria’s people even worse. The rest of the world – the US, Arab states, and Europe will at most provide short-term humanitarian aid to the people under Assad’s control.

If the country remains divided, Assad also will not have money from oil exports – the oil fields are in the East. Moreover, even he can establish full control along the urban line formed by Aleppo, Hama, Homs, and Damascus (See Figure One), these cities have already suffered massive damage, lost substantial parts of their population, and now lack a viable economy.

As for the rebels, whether they take over the country or preside over some form of divided state, their outside support will depend on their level of moderation and unity, the extent to which they are not perceived as an extremist or jihadist threat. It is also hard to see how even a united and moderate rebel regime – something that now seems to have limited probability – could develop an effective structure of governance and be able to plan and manage reconstruction for at least several years.

A divided Syria also presents major practical problems at almost every meaningful level.

- **Most of Syria’s population is in the West and far north.** One basic problem is that Syria’s Eastern half is far less populated, is largely a desert outside the northern border area and a narrow belt along the Euphrates River and Figure One shows it has limited major roads and limited infrastructure.

- **An East-West spilt would have to occur along lines that do not have viable demographics or a viable economic base.** Figure Two provides a rough estimate of the distribution of Syria’s population, and it is all too clear that it cannot house of support many of its refugees even if Syria could be peacefully partitioned.

- **Syria also faces deep divisions along sectarian lines.** If the country divided, the West would still have a Sunni majority, but an Alawite majority near its coast, which is the most developed area and the area with the most substantial rainfall. Figure Three provides a rough estimate of the distribution of Syria’s population by religion, and it is all too clear that the East now exclude much of Syria’s Sunni majority, and the East could not house of support many of its refugees even if Syria could be peacefully partitioned.

- **Any form of division between East and West also makes Syria’s ethnic problems much worse.** There is no reliable ethnic mapping of Syria, but Figures Three and Four provide reasonably reliable rough estimates of the distribution of the Arab and Kurdish populations. It is all too clear that a Kurdish population that was partly disenfranchised from the rights held by Syrian Arabs before the civil war is spread along the borders with Turkey and Iraq – two nations with their own problems with the Kurds – and is next to the KRG or Kurdish governed region in
Iraq. Syria is already seeing its Kurd move towards some form of autonomy or separatism, creating problems both for any form of separation between East and West, and future problems for any effort to fully reunite Syria.

- **Rainfall and crop distribution reinforce these problems.** As Figures Five and Six show, Syria lacks the agricultural base and water to adequately feed its current population as a united country unless it can fundamentally restructure its agriculture to make more effective use of water through methods like drip agriculture. Other data also show that the rains are far more uncertain in the east than the west, having a major impact on agricultural output. Furthermore, the facilities for creating safe drinking water are more limited. There is little ability to support a return of large numbers of refugees who are not permanently dependent on outside economic and food aid.

**The Civil War Has Also Created a Domestic Regional and National Economic Petroleum Crisis.**

Syria has additional problems with petroleum export and in getting adequate domestic energy problems that affect both any East-west split and its economic future. As Figure Seven shows, Syria’s petroleum resources are in the East and are now under rebel control. An analysis issued by the US Energy Information Agency in February 2014 reported that Syria’s oil production had been cut to a minimum since March 2011 because of the civil war and Western-led sanctions.xvi

Syria, previously the eastern Mediterranean's leading oil and natural gas producer, has seen its production fall to just a fraction of pre-conflict levels. Syria is no longer able to export oil, and as a result, government revenues from the energy sector have fallen significantly. Prior to the current conflict, Syria’s oil sector accounted for approximately one fourth of government revenues.

As of January 2014, Syrian officials reported the overall economic losses from the conflict reached more than $20 billion. Of that total, estimates from mid-2013 indicate that the losses from the hydrocarbons sector have topped $12 billion, from both direct causes (damage to infrastructure, spillage, and theft) and indirect causes (lost exports).

…According to the Syrian government, damage to the country's energy infrastructure and spilled or stolen oil and natural gas cost the country approximately $1 billion through the end of July 2013. The loss of Syria's oil exports, limited by sanctions by the United States, European Union (EU), and others, accounted for much of the remaining economic losses. In April 2013, the EU agreed to allow oil imports from Syria, although only from opposition groups, which do not currently have access to Syria's oil export infrastructure. In June 2013, the EU extended all sanctions on the Syrian government's oil exports for an additional 12 months.

Syria faces major challenges in supplying heating and fuel oil to its citizens, and electricity service in much of the country is sporadic as a result of fighting between government and opposition forces. Further, the exploration and development of the country's oil and natural gas fields is delayed indefinitely in most places, although the Syrian government did reach an exploration agreement with a Russian company in late 2013. Nevertheless, even when the fighting subsides, it will take months, or possibly years, for the Syrian domestic energy system to return to pre-conflict operating status.

The EIA estimated Syria’s oil production, which had averaged more than 400,000 barrels per day during 2008-10, was less than 25,000 barrels per day in January 2014. “Most of the international oil
companies previously involved in Syria’s energy sector have suspended operations, and according to Syrian government officials, the only oil companies still operating in Syria as of September 2013 were Hayan Petroleum and the Elba Petroleum Co., but they were operating without their IOC partners."

Syria was short of heating oil and diesel fuel. As the U.S. EIA reported, “[a]s of January 2014, Syria’s refineries are running at less than full capacity. According to government sources, the combined capacity of Syria’s two refineries has fallen to roughly half their pre-conflict output…Several proposed refineries are now on hold or cancelled altogether, such as the proposed 100,000 b/d facility at Abu Khashab backed by the Chinese National Petroleum Corp, which was cancelled because of the security situation in the country.” The EIA estimated that Syria’s consumption of products dropped to less than 260,000 barrels per days in 2012, and would be lower in 2013. The EIA also reported, “In the first half of 2013, the government spent more than $1 billion on petroleum subsidies, according to the Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources.”

Syria’s natural gas sector has not been impacted quite as severely by the ongoing conflict as its oil sector, although dry production is down by at least 30% compared to pre-conflict totals. Syria's dry natural gas production fell to less than 200 billion cubic feet (Bcf) in 2013 according to estimates from the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA). According to press reports, Syria is not currently importing natural gas from Egypt via the Arab Gas Pipeline.”

Syria’s electricity infrastructure, including power plants, substations, and transmission lines, was an increasingly common target of sabotage in 2013. The EIA also estimated that, “Even when the fighting subsides, it will take months or possibly years, for the Syrian domestic energy system to return to pre-conflict operating status,” EIA said. “Production and exports of crude oil have fallen to nearly zero, and the country is facing supply shortages for some refined products.”

**The Implications for Syria’s Least Bad Options**

Given these facts, the US, Europe, Arab World, and other aid donors need to look beyond both the military dimension and the need for short-term humanitarian aid and begin reconstruction planning now. The present structure of the refugee and aid crisis in Syria is shown in Figures Eight and Nine, but it is only a prelude to the aid needed in the future.

Aid efforts need to develop contingency plans for the probability that the refugee problem may well last for three to five more years, and that many refugees will not return on a voluntary basis to an unstable country where they now longer have homes, businesses, jobs, and credible government services. This means planning for years of major aid to Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Iraq. It means going for emergency humanitarian relief to aid that treats the inhabitant of refugee camps as long term residents, gives them key services, and address the problems of some form of employment and credible education.

It means donors must working with each country that now hosts large numbers of refugees to relocate some and provide aid that will allow them to integrate others into their economies. It means aid to provide major incentives for others to return to Syria.

There have been all too many past cases where refugees and the nations where they live have been left in limbo – with no real option beyond the marginal survival of isolated refugee camps with an increasingly hostile or indifferent native population.
It is equally clear that Syria will probably not be able to plan and manage its own reconstruction and a future Syria government may need strong international pressure to serve the interests of all its people, limit corruption and cronyism, and make enough progress to maintain security and stability. The UN and World Bank need to begin now to develop contingency plans for integrated aid efforts that focus on the overall economy of Syria under two very different conditions:

- Rebuilding after a politically acceptable regime reunites the country.
- Supporting the Eastern part of Syria in a de facto partition of Syria over a period of years or on a permanent basis.
- Using conditional aid to push the Assad regime towards reform in the West or all of Syria if it should win – as well as meeting humanitarian needs.

These are also options that must be based on realistic efforts that can actually be achieved at realistic costs. There is no point in planning for an aid burden that outside states will not be willing to bear, or for refugee populations that present host countries will not be willing to accept. A lack of realism now, and the ability actually execute reconstruction plans will create the risk of a lasting humanitarian crisis for many years after the civil war ends as well as the risk of forced repatriation of Syrian refugees.

Even under best case conditions, it means that many Syrians will suffer for at least half a decade after the civil war is over and that a population which is one-third children will see a generational impact that goes on indefinitely as children caught up in war with out proper education and future job prospects lives out the consequences of the conflict.

One thing is clear, a failure to plan, coordinate, and look towards the future – a classic description of far too many well intentioned past aid efforts – will make things far worse. It also seems all too likely that Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Iraq will have to live with major refugee problems for at least three to five more years, and that the end of the Syria civil war will still leave Syria as a major aid burden on Arab states and other aid donors for five to ten years after the conflict is over. Syria is likely to remain the land of least bad options long after its civil war ends, but the least bad option will be far better than the worst.
Figure One: Syria: Main Lines of Communication and Population centers

Source:
http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=Syria%2c+population+density+map&FORM=IQFRBA&id=7E151AA906D923018B1194CBD6F64607BC9D05E6&selectedIndex=32#view=detail&id=7E151AA906D923018B1194CBD6F64607BC9D05E6&selectedIndex=0
Figure Two: Syria Population Density

Source
http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=Syria%2c+population+density+map&id=7CD1C1B0A21F0A23278E0CFE65CA71DA2FCF4C6A&FORM=IQRBA
Figure Four: Syria: Location of Population by Religion and Ethnicity: Estimate One

Source:
http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=Syria%2C+ethnic+map&qs=n&form=QBIR&pq=syria%2C+ethnic+map&sc=1
Figure Five: Syria: Location of Population by Religion and Ethnicity: Estimate Two

Source: http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=Syria%2C+ethnic+map&qs=n&form=QBIR&pq=syria%2C+ethnic+map&sc=1
Figure Six: Syria: Water and Rainfall

Source:
http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=Syria%2C+ethnic+map&qs=n&form=QBIR&pq=syria%2C+ethnic+map&sc=1
Syria: Cropland and Land Utilization
Figure Seven: Syria’s Petroleum Resources and Production Facilities

Source: http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=SY.
Figure Eight: Syrian Refugee Locations at End of 2013

Source: http://www.unhcr.org/528a0a2d15.html.
Figure Nine: Syria: Aid Efforts in 2013
