Armed Conflict in Syria: U.S. and International Response

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Summary

Syria is mired in an armed conflict between forces loyal to President Bashar al Asad and rebel fighters opposed to his rule. The conflict is creating a regional humanitarian emergency as well as risks of violent spillover that appear to be growing as the fighting intensifies. Various reports suggest that as many as 50,000 Syrians have been killed since major political unrest began in March 2011, including more than 10,000 security personnel. As of December 19, more than 533,000 refugees had fled the country, over 300,000 of them since September 2012. According to the Syrian Red Crescent, as many as 2.5 million Syrians may be internally displaced, and the United Nations (U.N.) is seeking $1.5 billion to aid Syrians in need of assistance.

U.S. officials and many analysts believe that Asad and his supporters will ultimately be forced from power, but few offer specific, credible timetables for a resolution to Syria’s ongoing crisis. Reports of recent rebel military gains suggest that opposition forces are becoming more formidable, but government forces continue to resist, using air strikes and artillery in punishing counterattacks. Extensive damage is being done to major urban areas and national infrastructure. These factors, and the resulting polarization of various political, ethnic, and sectarian factions, all but guarantee that political, security, humanitarian, and economic challenges will outlast Asad and may keep Syria on the agenda of Congress for years to come.

President Obama and his Administration have been calling for Asad’s resignation since August 2011, and have been vocal advocates for United Nations Security Council action to condemn the Syrian government and end the bloodshed. U.S. officials have supported efforts to improve international policy coordination on Syria and to build consensus among Syrian opposition groups. The Administration has given no indication that it intends to pursue any form of direct military intervention, unless Syria’s stockpiles of chemical weapons are used or transferred. U.S. officials and some Members of Congress continue to debate various proposals for ending the violence and accelerating Asad’s departure. Nevertheless, the Syria that emerges from the current conflict is likely to pose its own unique challenges for U.S. policy in the region and may require significant international support to rebuild and maintain stability.

After over 18 months of unrest and violence, dilemmas and contradictions characterize Syria’s crisis. A menu of imperfect choices confronts U.S. policymakers, amid fears of continued violence, evidence of a widening humanitarian crisis, and regional instability. The potential spillover effects of continued fighting raise questions with regard to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Israel. Signs of sectarian and ethnic conflict are emerging in Syria, and the unrest also is creating new opportunities for Al Qaeda and other violent extremist groups to operate there. The security of Syrian conventional and chemical weapons stockpiles has become a regional security concern that will grow if a security vacuum emerges. Many observers worry that a further escalation in fighting or swift regime change could jeopardize weapons security, generate new pressures on minority groups, or lead to wider civil or regional conflict. A sudden departure by Asad and key allies would do little to guarantee security or stability in Syria. United Nations and Arab League Special Envoy to Syria Lakhdar Brahimi warned in November 2012 of the danger of “Somalisation” of Syria—“the collapse of the state and the emergence of warlords, militias and fighting groups.” Determining the threshold for such a collapse may prove difficult.

Members of Congress and Obama Administration officials are weighing these issues as they debate U.S. policy and the Syrian crisis.
Contents

Assessment ...................................................................................................................................... 1
- Status of Ongoing Civil War........................................................................................................ 1
- Attempts at Unifying the Syrian Political Opposition............................................................... 5
- Possible Scenarios ................................................................................................................... 10

U.S. Policy and Issues for Congress .............................................................................................. 12
- Arms, Intervention, and Syria’s Opposition: Changes in U.S. Policy? ................................... 14
- Key Security Issues .................................................................................................................. 15
  - Al Qaeda, Extremism, and Foreign Fighters ........................................................................... 15
  - Securing Syrian Weapons Stockpiles .................................................................................. 17
- Outlook and Future Policy Considerations for Congress ......................................................... 19
  - Possible Appropriations and Authorization Issues .............................................................. 19
  - Securing Weapons Supplies and Sites ................................................................................. 20
- Addressing Syria’s State Sponsor of Terrorism Status ........................................................... 21
- Requested Middle East and North Africa Incentive Fund (MENA-IF) .................................... 22
- Possible Questions for Oversight ............................................................................................ 23

Figures

- Figure 1. Map of Syria: Conflict and Basic Data................................................................. 3
- Figure 2. Syrian Opposition Groups: Relationships and Factions ........................................... 6
- Figure 3. Profiles of Select Opposition Groups and Militias ................................................... 7
- Figure 4. Profiles of Select Opposition Groups and Militias ................................................... 8

Tables

- Table C-1. U.S. Sanctions Against Syria in 2011-2012 ......................................................... 34

Appendixes

- Appendix A. Syria Legislation in the 112th Congress ............................................................ 25
- Appendix B. Chronology of United Nations Action on Syria .................................................. 30
- Appendix C. U.S. Sanctions on Syria ....................................................................................... 32

Contacts

Author Contact Information......................................................................................................... 44
Assessment

The escalating conflict in Syria poses increasingly complex and difficult policy questions for Congress and the Obama Administration. The popular-uprising-turned-armed-rebellion against the Asad regime is approaching its third year, and seems poised to continue, with the government and a bewildering array of militias locked in a bloody struggle of attrition. Violent extremists, including foreign fighters, have assertively demonstrated their presence in Syria, and the Syrian government has resorted to indiscriminate attacks on rebel-held areas and stated its willingness to use its unconventional weapons in the event of foreign military intervention. The Syrian opposition’s political divisions persist, even as the resilience and tactics of armed rebels are making the limitations of the Syrian security forces more and more apparent. Since September 2012, hundreds of thousands of new refugees have crossed into neighboring countries, as regional actors express alarm, offer support to proxies, and seek to define their respective “red lines.”

These factors complicate ongoing debates over U.S. national interests in Syria and potential policy responses. To date, debate has largely focused on the humanitarian and regional balance of power implications of the uprising, and Members of Congress have weighed various policy proposals in the hope of catalyzing and assisting a relatively orderly negotiated transition. Looking ahead, the prospects for such a transition appear to be all but nonexistent, and the focus of debate is shifting toward assessing the likelihood and mitigating the negative consequences of a series of less orderly contingencies. Issues of particular concern include the security of chemical weapons and conventional arms stockpiles, regional refugee flows, the future of violent extremist groups, the potential for prolonged sectarian or ethnic conflict, and the future costs of rebuilding.

Status of Ongoing Civil War

As of December 2012, Syria’s civil war rages on. Opposition forces have strengthened their capabilities and broadened their control over northwestern Syria, but neither they nor the Alawite-dominated security forces of President Bashar al Asad have been able to deal a decisive blow to the other side. The broad grouping of forces opposing Asad’s regime includes a multitude of local militias, army defectors, and volunteers fighting in brigades under the banner of the Free Syrian Army, and various armed Islamist groups. These rebel forces have gradually seized territory in an arc along the Syria-Turkey border. Kurdish forces have asserted control in northeastern Syria, and some Kurdish militias have clashed with Arab Islamist opposition groups. Until recently, the pace of rebel gains was hampered by their lack of air defense, basic supplies, and internal coordination. However, some rebels have seized heavy weaponry and man-portable air defense systems (MANPADs) from government stockpiles, raising the prospect of a significant change in the tactical dynamics of the conflict.

Although bombings and clashes occur daily near and now in the capital, Damascus, much of the fighting since mid-2012 has involved a fierce contest for control over Aleppo, Syria’s commercial hub and second-largest city. Multiple news sources and rebel videos indicate that rebel forces have taken over several military bases outside the city, along with strategic towns and checkpoints along the main highway that links Aleppo to Damascus. These rebel gains have created a major obstacle for the government’s resupply of its forces in northern Syria. As Asad regime ground units are now limited in their movements in the north, the regime has resorted to the use of air power and indiscriminate shelling of entire population centers, a “scorched earth” strategy to leave rebels with damaged physical infrastructure and a resentful population in need.
As death tolls have spiraled over time, both sides have adopted brutal tactics, leading to some concern that war crimes are being committed not only by regime forces but also by the opposition. Irregular pro-government militias continue to terrorize opposition sympathizers, and alleged Internet video footage that surfaced in November 2012 appeared to be the latest example of rebel fighters executing captured government soldiers. Sunni extremist groups also appear to have become much more active in recent months, detonating car and suicide bombs—including in Damascus—and assassinating several high level regime officials.

Many analysts anticipate that in the weeks and months ahead, rebel forces will continue to wear down government forces, particularly if the operation of government air forces becomes limited by rebel air defenses. The true test for the opposition remains the consolidation of nominal control over bases, neighborhoods, and cities and the development of a cooperative and compatible political-military effort. Opposition forces, including Free Syrian Army brigades in different cities, continue to operate relatively independently, and some groups hold divergent if not contradictory views about the country’s political future. Syria’s armed forces remain under tremendous strain, and even its most elite Alawite-commanded units were not trained or equipped to wage a long counter-insurgency campaign. The regime’s resilience has come partly from significant outside assistance from Iran, Russia, and Hezbollah, though the extent of this support and its impact on the battlefield are unknown. Pro-Asad paramilitary militias also play a role.

Overall, Syria’s civil war is growing more complex. Sporadic clashes have broken out within the ranks of the armed opposition and allegedly within the tight-knit Alawite community. Violence also has spilled over to varying degrees into neighboring states, such as Israel, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon. Many observers are concerned that as the civil war erodes government institutions, the country will descend into anarchy. Under this scenario, fighting would gradually turn from a two-sided war into a contest involving multiple combatants from armed ethnic/sectarian communities, rebel militias, and remnants of the old regime. In November 2012, Lakhdar Brahimi, the United Nations and Arab League Special Envoy to Syria, warned that “if this issue is not dealt with correctly, the danger is ‘Somalisation’ and not partition—the collapse of the state and the emergence of warlords, militias and fighting groups.”

Precise official casualty figures are not available. The Strategic Research and Communication Centre, a research organization on Syria, reported that as of December 19, 2012, 50,157 Syrians had been killed since the revolt began in March 2011. The United Kingdom-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported on December 20 that more than 44,000 people had been killed since March 2011. Since September 2012, intense fighting has doubled the number of Syrians fleeing their homes as internally displaced persons or outside of Syria as refugees. Of December 19, 533,470 refugees had registered or were waiting to register with the United Nations (U.N.) in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and North Africa. The Syrian Red Crescent believes that as many as 2.5 million Syrians may be internally displaced, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees believes that as many as 4 million Syrians may be in need of assistance by early 2013.

The U.N. suspended its operations in Syria on December 3 as a result of deteriorating security conditions, placing the future of U.N. and other relief operations in question. On December 19, the United Nations, humanitarian organizations, and the government of Syria released estimates and appeals for assistance for Syrian refugees as well as those displaced or otherwise in need in Syria. A U.N. Syria Regional Response Plan seeks $1 billion for Syrian refugees through the first half of 2013. A U.N. Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan for Syria, prepared in part by the government of Syria, seeks $519 million to support Syrians affected by the conflict through the first half of 2013.

1 Section 1295 of H.R. 4310, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013, would require the Administration to provide a report within 90 days of enactment on Russian military assistance to Syria.
Figure 1. Map of Syria: Conflict and Basic Data

Land Area: 185,180 sq km* (slightly larger than North Dakota) *Includes 1,295 sq km of Israeli-occupied territory
Population: 22,530,746 (July 2012 est.)
Religions: Sunni Muslim 74%, other Muslim (Alawite, Druze, Shiite) 16%, Christian (various denominations) 10%, Jewish (very small communities in Damascus, Al Qamishli, and Aleppo)
Ethnic Groups: Arab 90.3%, Kurds, Armenians, Circassians and other 9.7%
GDP (PPP, growth rate): 107.6 billion, -2% (2011 est.)

GDP per capita: $5,100 (2011 est.)
Budget (spending): $18.31 billion (2011 est.)
Literacy (total, male/female): 79.6%, 86%/73.6% (2004 census)
Oil and Natural Gas reserves: 2.5 billion barrels, 6.19 billion cubic meters
Oil production: 230,000 barrels per day (June 2012 estimate; production reduced to match domestic refinery capacity)

Historical Background and Syria’s Diverse Population

Syrians have long struggled with many of the same challenges that have bred deep dissatisfaction in other Arab autocracies, including high unemployment, high inflation, limited upward mobility, rampant corruption, lack of political freedoms, and repressive security forces. These factors have fueled opposition to Syria’s authoritarian government, which has been dominated by the Baath (Renaissance) Party since 1963, and the Al Asad family since 1970. President Bashar al Asad’s father—Hafiz al Asad—ruled the country from 1970 until his death in 2000.

The Syrian population, like those of several other Middle East countries, includes different ethnic and religious groups. Under the Asad regime strict political controls have prevented these differences from playing a divisive role in political or social life. A majority of Syrians, roughly 90% of the population, are ethnic Arabs; however, the country contains small ethnic minorities, notably Kurds, the country’s largest distinct ethnic/linguistic minority (7%-10% of the total population). Of more importance in Syria are religious sectarian differences. In addition to the majority Sunni Muslims, who comprise over 70% of the population, Syria contains several religious sectarian minorities, including three smaller Muslim sects (Alawites, Druze, and Ismailis) and several Christian denominations. The Asad family are members of the minority Alawite sect (roughly 12% of the population), which has its roots in Shiite Islam.

Despite the secular nature of the ruling Baath party, religious sects have been important to some Syrians as symbols of group identity and determinants of political orientation. The Asads and the Baath party have cultivated Alawites as a key base of support, and elite security forces have long been led by Alawites. The government violently suppressed an armed uprising led by the Muslim Brotherhood in the early 1980s, killing thousands of Sunni Muslims and others.

Religious, ethnic, geographic, and economic identities overlap in influencing the views and choices of Syrians about the current conflict. Within ethnic and sectarian communities are important tribal and familial groupings that often provide the underpinning for political alliances and commercial relationships. Socioeconomic differences abound among farmers, laborers, middle-class wage earners, public sector employees, military officials, and the political and commercial elite. Many rural, less advantaged Syrians have supported the opposition movement, while urban, wealthier Syrians appear to have more divided loyalties. Local attachments also shape Syrian society, as seen in rivalries between Syria’s two largest cities of Damascus and Aleppo, in differences between rural agricultural communities and urban areas, and in the concentration of some sectarian and ethnic communities in discrete areas. Despite being authoritarian, Syrian leaders have often found it necessary to adopt policies that accommodate, to some degree, various power centers within the country’s diverse population and minimize the potential for communal identities to create conflict.

That need is likely to remain, if not intensify, after the current conflict. While sectarian considerations cannot fully explain power relationships in Syria or predict the future dynamics of the uprising, there are indications that as the fighting continues sectarian and ethnic divisions are growing among Syrians. The Sunni Arab majority has been at the forefront of the protest movement and armed opposition to the Alawite-led regime, with Syria’s Christians and other minority groups caught between their parallel fears of violent change and of being associated with Asad’s crackdown. The Alawite leadership of the Syrian government and its allies in other sects perceive the mostly Sunni Arab uprising as an existential threat to the Baath party’s nearly five-decade hold on power. At the popular level, some Alawites may feel caught between the regime’s demands for loyalty and their fears of retribution from other groups in the event of regime change or a post-Asad civil war.

Some Sunni Arabs may view the conflict as a means to assert their community’s dominance over others, but some Sunni opposition leaders have sought to assuage these concerns. The opposition Syrian National Council (SNC, see below) released a statement in February 2012 stating that its members “consider members of the Alawite sect to be an essential element of Syria’s cultural and ethnic fabric. The Alawites remain an important component of Syria, and will continue to enjoy the same rights as other citizens as we build one nation of Christians, Muslims, and other sects.” Others have pledged that orderly trials and the rule of law will prevail in any post-conflict setting. However, reports of abuses suggest that rebel leaders at times are unable or unwilling to ensure such sentiments prevail.

While some Kurds view the conflict as an opportunity to achieve greater autonomy, others are wary of supporting Sunni Arab rebels that, should they come to power, may be no less hostile to Kurdish political aspirations than the Alawite-led Asad government. Some members of Syria’s various Christian communities fear that the uprising will lead to a sectarian civil war and that they could be subjected to violent repression, given that Muslim extremist groups have targeted Iraqi Christians since the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Other Christians reportedly are assisting the armed opposition, including locally active militias and the Free Syrian Army.

Attempts at Unifying the Syrian Political Opposition

The decentralized nature and divided views of key Syrian opposition forces have tempered foreign support for the opposition movement. Since unrest began in March 2011, no single leader or group has been able to fully establish itself as a universally supported representative of Syrians seeking to oust the Asad regime. Third parties have been forced to manage relationships with a complex and diverse set of Syrian opposition figures, as rivalries have developed between local leaders and exiles, among militia commanders on the ground, and between those who seek accommodation with elements of the existing government and those who seek to bring down the entire regime structure. Deep differences of opinion lurk beneath the surface about the future of Syria, with Islamist and secular activists at odds, some Kurds seeking autonomy, and armed extremist groups empowering themselves on the ground.

The latest attempt to engineer a united opposition front came in October and November 2012, and saw the Syrian National Council (SNC, see Figure 3 below) incorporated into a broader umbrella group known as the National Coalition of Revolution and Opposition Forces (National Coalition, see Figure 3 below). The SNC had previously been recognized by some outsiders as “a legitimate representative of Syrians seeking peaceful democratic change.” However, the United States and others in the international community grew frustrated by SNC infighting; its inability to attract more members of Syrian minority communities; its inability to reconcile with rival opposition groups; and its perceived lack of legitimacy inside Syria.3

In pressing for an opposition coalition that would be more inclusive and legitimate, the United States, Qatar, and other international actors endorsed a plan proposed by long-time Syrian dissident and former parliamentarian Riad Seif.4 The Qatari government organized an opposition conference in Doha in early November to debate Seif’s proposal, and many prominent opposition factions agreed to unite under the auspices of the National Coalition. To date, several key groups, including powerful Kurdish factions and the anti-intervention National Coordination Body for Democratic Change, have refused to offer their support. The Free Syrian Army leadership has endorsed the Coalition, but units fighting under its banner inside Syria appear to hold varying views on the initiative. Several non-FSA armed groups also have not backed the Coalition.

Some observers suggest that, in political terms, the National Coalition does not differ substantially from the SNC, since Coalition representatives include many SNC members, leaving less room for non-SNC groups. National Coalition leaders have not advocated strongly for foreign military intervention and appear confident that Syrians are poised to depose Asad on their own. In the run-up to the December 2012 Friends of Syria conference in Morocco, several governments, including the United States, extended recognition to the National Coalition as “the legitimate representative of the Syrian people.”

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3 In late October, Secretary of State Hilary Rodham Clinton denounced the SNC, stating that “There has to be representation of those who are on the front lines, fighting and dying today to obtain their freedom.... This cannot be an opposition represented by people who have many good attributes, but have, in many instances, have not been inside Syria for 20, 30 or 40 years.”

4 Seif’s plan, known as the Syrian National Initiative, advocated for the creation of a broad coalition consisting of both internal and external opposition members with subcommittees dedicated to military affairs, judicial issues, forming a transition government, and administering international aid and relations with foreign nations.
Figure 2. Syrian Opposition Groups: Relationships and Factions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activists and Armed Groups Supportive of National Coalition</th>
<th>Activist and Armed Groups Not Yet Supportive of National Coalition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces</td>
<td>Kurdish Democratic Union Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Coordinating Committees*</td>
<td>Syrian Revolution Coordinators Union*</td>
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<td>Syrian National Council</td>
<td>Free Syrian Army*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Syrian Revolution General Commission</td>
<td>Kurdish National Council*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independents, National Figures, and Local Council Representatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Islamic Militia and Other Armed Groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Al Haq Brigade</td>
<td>Al Nusra Front</td>
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<td>Tawhid Brigade</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ahrar al Sham Battles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Al Farouq Battalions (FSA)</td>
<td>Ansar al Islam (FSA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sagour al Sham Brigade</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Many of the groups that supported the creation of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces have diverse memberships of local activists, factions, and brigades. These actors may hold differing views of the National Coalition and its decisions. The Kurdish National Council (KNC) reportedly offered conditional support for the Coalition if several political issues, including Kurdish representation in the Coalition and rights in a future Syria, would be addressed. The KNC was allocated membership in the Coalition, but its support is still being determined. Coalition leaders reportedly have deferred decisions regarding the constitutional issues raised by the KNC until a democratically elected government has been formed.

Source: CRS Graphics, Syrian opposition social media and websites.
Armed Conflict in Syria: U.S. and International Response

Figure 3. Profiles of Select Opposition Groups and Militias

<table>
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<tr>
<td><strong>National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces</strong></td>
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</table>
| *Formed in Qatar, November 2012.*  
Umbrella coalition for opposition groups intended to expand representation and establish legitimate unified voice for engagement with international community. Critics include anti-intervention Syrians and some Kurdish groups. Led by Moaz al-Khatib, a Sunni imam from the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. Deputy leaders are Riad Seif and Suhair Atassi, a secular female activist. Third deputy seat reserved for a Kurdish representative. Governed by 65-seat assembly made up of Syrian National Council (22 seats), provincial revolutionary councils (14 seats), national figures (10 seats), Alawites (5 seats), the Muslim Brotherhood (1 seat), and other groups (13 seats). National Coalition may form a transitional government, and has established a Supreme Military Committee that is working to unite and better lead diverse armed factions. |

**Syrian National Council (SNC)**  
*Formed in Turkey, October 2011.*  
Subsumed under National Coalition. Led by Damascus Declaration co-founder and leftist activist George Sabra. Consists mainly of exile activists, including Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, secular elites, intellectuals, independents, and ethnic and religious minorities such as Kurds and Christians. During 2012, several leading members resigned in protest of SNC decision making and a perceived lack of effectiveness. Some Syrian critics allege that the SNC is dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood and overly influenced by the Turkish government.

**Free Syrian Army (FSA)**  
Consists of brigades made up of various combinations of armed dissident military personnel and civilian volunteers. Reports suggest that the FSA has improved its command structure, logistics, intelligence, and tactical capabilities, but some brigades fighting under the FSA banner appear to remain only nominally affiliated with FSA commanders, including FSA leader Colonel Riyad al-Asad (not related to the president), who defected to the opposition in mid-March 2011. The FSA coalition includes brigades considered by Syrians and outside observers to have an Islamist orientation.

**Muslim Brotherhood of Syria**  
Has opposed the Baathist government for decades, both through nonviolent opposition and armed violence. Its leaders have remained in exile since the unsuccessful armed uprising of the 1970s and 1980s, during which membership in the group became, according to Syrian law, a capital offense. The Brotherhood controls 25% of the seats in the Syrian National Council and is represented within the National Coalition via the SNC and independently. Some Syrian opposition activists accuse the Brotherhood of seeking to influence the uprising and direct any post-Asad transition in an Islamist direction. The group released a charter in March 2012 that outlines a commitment to a number of civil and political rights, condemns torture, and calls for “a modern civil state based on a civil constitution that emanates from the will of the Syrian people on the basis of national consensus.” Leaders include Comptroller General Mohammed Riyad al-Shaqfah and SNC Executive Council member Mohammed Farooq Tayfour.

**Kurdish National Council (KNC)**  
Umbrella organization of several smaller Kurdish political parties, brought together by Iraqi Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani. The KNC has called for the creation of an autonomous Kurdish region within a federated Syria, a position that has put it at odds with some other opposition groups. It also has demanded compensation for historical Kurdish suffering and the removal of the word “Arab” from Syria’s official name: the Syrian Arab Republic.

**Local Coordinating Committees (LCCs)**  
During the protest stage of the uprising, LCCs active in many Syrian communities created an informal network to link activists nationally. The LCCs continue to report on developments across the country, organize protests, and coordinate relief efforts in conflict-affected areas. The national coordinating body for the LCCs has endorsed the National Coalition, but individual communities and leaders may hold differing views on the Coalition and its decisions.

Source: CRS. Derived from U.S. government Open Source Center reports, social media, and official statements as reported by international press sources.

Notes: Positions, platforms, and membership of groups subject to change.
Figure 4. Profiles of Select Opposition Groups and Militias

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups Not Yet Supportive of National Coalition, Islamist Militia, and Other Armed Groups</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Coordination Body for Democratic Change (NCB)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Formed in the summer of 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Syria-based alliance of leftist groups, Kurdish activists, and individuals associated with the 2005 Damascus Declaration on political reform. The NCB has stated a willingness to negotiate with the Assad regime (predicated on an end to the use of force against civilians) and opposes foreign intervention in Syria's conflict. Repeated attempts to merge the NCB with the Syrian National Council failed, and the NCB has declined to support the National Coalition.</td>
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| **Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD)/Kurdish Popular Protection Units (YPG)**                               |
| The PYD is a member of the NCB and is affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a U.S. designated foreign terrorist organization. PYD officials, including the group's leader Saleh Muslim Mohammed, seek Kurdish autonomy in Syria. The group opposes foreign intervention and has rejected entreaties to join the SNC or National Coalition. In July 2012, Iraqi Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani brokered an agreement between the PYD and its rival in the KNC to form a Kurdish Supreme Committee to administer “West Kurdistan.” The committee nominally controls armed popular protection units (YPG), known colloquially as asayish or “security,” which have asserted control in some majority-Kurdish areas and clashed with some Sunni Arab opposition militias. PYD-affiliated units are reported to have several thousand members. |

| **Al Nusra Front**                                                                                             |
| A Salafi-jihadist militia, the “Support Front for the People of Syria” emerged in early 2012 and claimed responsibility for a series of high profile suicide bombing attacks against government security forces and summary executions of captured regime soldiers. Its messaging, tactics, and ideology mirror those of Al Qaeda affiliates in other regional conflict zones. In recent months, reporting from Syria suggests that Al Nusra front members have been coordinating more closely with other opposition factions in northern Syria. The prospect for clashes between Al Nusra and other groups remains, as the Front’s uncompromising views on the strict implementation of Islamic religious law create rifts with other Sunni Arabs and Kurds, not to mention religious minorities. The United States has designated Al Nusra as a Foreign Terrorist Organization and two of its leaders as acting on behalf of Al Qaeda in Iraq pursuant to Executive Order 13224. |

| **Ahrar al Sham Battalions**                                                                                      |
| The “Free Ones of Syria” are a coalition of Salafist-jihadist militias active in northern Syria. Its statements suggest its members are motivated by anti-Shiite sectarian views and may support the establishment of an Islamic state. Group members in Aleppo publicly rejected the establishment of the National Coalition in November, although group leaders subsequently clarified the group’s conditional support for the initiative. Social media posts by the group exhibit the use of improvised explosive devices against government forces. |

| **Saqour al Sham Brigade**                                                                                        |
| Based in northwestern Idlib province, the “Falcons of Syria” are a Salafis-jihadist militia group that calls for the establishment of an Islamic state and has made contradictory statements about Syrian religious minorities. Ahmed Isa al Sheikh leads the group’s estimated four thousand fighters and has given interviews to international media. |

| **Al Farouq Battalions (FSA)**                                                                                     |
| The Al Farouq Battalions are a coalition of militias fighting under the banner of the Free Syrian Army. The main Al Farouq Battalion is based in Idlib. Different chapters have taken different approaches to coordination with Salafist-jihadist militias, leading some FSA supporters to question Al Farouq members’ intentions. According to various media reports, some Al Farouq fighters may receive support from sources in Saudi Arabia, while others may receive support from the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. |


Notes: Positions, platforms, and membership of groups subject to change.
Syria’s Neighbors: Implications and Involvement

Syria’s civil war is gradually encroaching upon its neighbors. In addition to the refugees entering neighboring countries, Assad’s forces have exchanged fire with the Turkish and Israeli militaries, and sectarian violence in Lebanon and Iraq has increased in recent months.

In Turkey, the Turkish army has exchanged artillery barrages with Syrian forces and scrambled fighter jets in response to shelling and bombing attacks on rebel-held Syrian border towns, some of which have affected Turkish territory. On October 7, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated that “although Turkey does not want war, it is close to war.” In early November, nearly 9,000 Syrian refugees fleeing violence crossed the border into Turkey in a single day. As of December 17, 141,240 Syrian refugees had been registered in Turkey. Turkey has established refugee camps in the provinces of Hatay, Sanliurfa, and Gaziantep (see Figure 1 above). NATO has approved Turkey’s request for the deployment of Patriot PAC-3 surface-to-air missile defense systems, a move that some experts believe could create a de-facto no-fly-zone along the Syrian-Turkish border. Turkish officials have stressed that any missile systems deployed will be used for missile defense purposes only.

In Lebanon, security forces have confronted increased weapons smuggling by Syrian rebels, incursions by Syrian troops, and sectarian clashes inside Lebanese cities. Lebanese Sunnis have recently clashed with Lebanese Alawites and members of Hezbollah in the cities of Sidon and Tripoli. The October 2012 killing of Brigadier General Wissam Hassan has brought the threat of Syrian spillover to the forefront of Lebanese national politics. In 2012, a string of reported assassination attempts targeting several anti-Assad politicians had already created controversy. Suspicion has fallen broadly on the Assad government and its Lebanese allies. In December, a prominent Sunni member of the Lebanese parliament admitted to smuggling weapons to armed opposition groups in Syria. As of December 19, 163,268 Syrian refugees had registered or sought registration with the United Nations in Lebanon.

In Israel during November 2012, the Israeli Defense Forces destroyed a Syrian mobile artillery launcher after Syrian forces fired into Israeli territory, perhaps as a provocation and warning to the international community that the Assad government will enflame the region should foreign nations partner with the rebels. Israel’s retaliatory attack came just days after three Syrian tanks entered the demilitarized zone in the Golan Heights. U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has warned of the risks of Israeli-Syrian conflict as a result. In May and June 2011, Palestinian refugees residing in Syria protested along the border with Israel and breached the border itself, drawing fire from Israeli soldiers that led to the deaths of 27 people. Many observers believe that President Assad deliberately organized the protests in order to provoke Israel, distract attention from the uprising, and demonstrate his ability to destabilize the region.

In Iraq, Sunni and Shiite Arabs and Iraqi Kurds appear to be supporting opposing sides of the Syrian conflict. Iraq’s government aims to avoid a return to sectarian warfare and avoid ethnic conflict with the Kurdistan Regional Government, but leaders in Baghdad have been accused of allowing Iranian arms shipments to Syria to cross Iraqi territory. Media accounts report that Iraqi Sunni Islamists and tribesmen are crossing into Syria to fight alongside various opposition militias, and Iraqi Shiite militias are fighting with Assad regime forces. The actual size of either side’s contribution of fighters inside Syria is unknown. Iraqi Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani has actively promoted cooperation among Syrian Kurds in pursuit of greater autonomy for what some Kurds refer to as “West Kurdistan,” the predominantly Kurdish areas in northeastern Syria. Many analysts fear that Al Qaeda in Iraq also has been active in the Syrian civil war, supporting and training Sunni extremist groups in Syria. The activities of Sunni extremists may draw a counter-response from Iraqi Shiites who see the Syrian conflict in zero sum regional and sectarian terms. U.S. officials reportedly pressured Iraqi leaders to close Iraqi air space to Iran-to-Syria cargo flights clandestinely carrying weapons. However, subsequent media reports suggest that Iran continues to resupply Syria over Iraqi air space.

As of December 19, 66,532 Syrian refugees had registered or sought registration with the United Nations in Iraq.

In Jordan, skirmishes have broken out between Assad’s army and Jordanian border guards as Syrian forces try to maintain control over the frontier. Jordan also fears Syria’s stockpiles of chemical weapons and their potential used or transferred. Scattered reports suggest Jordanian “jihadists” are leaving the country to join radical groups, such as the Al Nusrah Front, in Syria to fight the Assad regime. Though some Sunni Arab governments have openly pledged to arm Syrian rebels, Jordan’s role in assisting the opposition has been more muted. Still, there are potentially hundreds of Syrian army defectors living under close watch inside Jordan who have been granted refuge. As of December 20, 151,649 Syrian refugees had registered or sought registration with the United Nations in Jordan.

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Possible Scenarios

Opposition military gains in late 2012 are rekindling speculation that President Asad’s government may be forced from power relatively soon, as some observers initially believed in 2011. However, other projections continue to warn against underestimating the regime’s staying power, and point to factors such as the relative disorganization of rebel forces as cause for caution in expecting conclusive change. Some experts note that neighboring Lebanon’s sectarian civil war lasted 15 years before warring parties reached a political solution. In Iraq between 1991 and 2003, the late Saddam Hussein retained control over a war-ravaged country despite widespread Kurdish and Shiite opposition to his rule and a Western-imposed no-fly zone covering significant swaths of the country.

At present, a number of factors shape the relative prospects of the Asad government and the opposition, including

- The performance of the armed opposition on the battlefield, particularly in and around Aleppo and Damascus; rebel seizures of heavy weaponry, important bases, or advanced anti-aircraft defense systems; and the opposition’s ability to eliminate or attract members of President Asad’s inner circle;
- The ability of various armed and political opposition groups to cooperate, agree on a common program, and maintain legitimacy in the eyes of Syrians and third parties;
- The ability of the government to pay public sector salaries, ensure supplies of basic goods, and deliver services and utilities amidst economic sanctions and conflict;
- The willingness of minority groups that so far have been either neutral or supportive of the government to join the ranks of the opposition;
- The availability of outside military and financial assistance for the Syrian government and the opposition; and
- The morale of the armed forces in the face of ongoing fighting and their brutal suppression campaign against civilians.

In this context, a range of scenarios and outcomes are possible, and are not mutually exclusive:

Imminent Regime Defeat? As of mid-December 2012, various rebel groups have made strong gains against the Asad regime’s air force and against ground troops in and around Aleppo and Damascus. Rebel gains have been buttressed by their acquisition of heavy weaponry seized from captured military bases and much improved coordination. In November 2012, rebel fighters captured several northern military bases and seized tanks, armored personnel carriers, mortars, artillery, rocket-propelled grenades, ammunition, and surface-to-air missiles. However, many military experts suggest that though the regime may be losing a battle of attrition, it could take much longer to uproot armed regime supporters from Damascus and other strongholds. Some rebel groups are coordinating more closely, but many are not, and the disparate groups are still far from creating a coherent and unified military structure. Rebel fighters had not seized full control over any major Syrian city. According to one estimate, the Syrian army has dwindled from about
250,000 soldiers to little more than 100,000 and rebel forces probably have grown to an estimated 40,000 to 60,000 men. Overall, the Asad regime’s military forces have been degraded but not defeated. A sudden departure by Asad would leave military forces and political allies to an uncertain fate and do little to guarantee an end to fighting or the disarmament of militias.

An Enduring Conflict and State Collapse? Both sides could remain locked in armed conflict, unable to prevail, and unwilling to negotiate over power sharing. This scenario could lead to tens of thousands more casualties and mass civilian displacement before exhaustion settles in and negotiation ensues. Some observers have speculated that if conflict persists and state authority weakens further, Syria could splinter into Alawite, Sunni, Christian, and Kurdish enclaves, with mixed populations in urban areas divided by sectarian neighborhoods. Already, there have been reports of clashes between Kurds and Arab rebel fighters in several northern areas. Others have questioned whether ethnic and sectarian divisions will be the principal driver of state collapse, or whether local authority and organization will predominate, continuing the trend started by local opposition groups that have self-organized politically, economically, and even militarily. The prospect of partial or total state collapse poses serious security risks. Syrian weapon stockpiles could proliferate and transnational violent extremists could exploit the resulting insecurity.

A Military Coup? The Asad regime is known for its intricate system of control over commanders in the military and intelligence apparatus, and many military leaders are linked by kinship ties. As of December 2012, no members of the core Alawite leadership of the Asad regime have defected. Nevertheless, a military coup remains a remote possibility. Some military commanders, when faced with mounting battlefield losses and the prospect of defeat, may calculate that a move against the Asad family could be enough to salvage a place at the negotiating table during a transition process. The defection of General Manaf Tlass—one of the most senior officials to defect thus far—was hailed as a significant blow to the regime, but Tlass has not demonstrated success in creating a more unified military-led opposition council.

A Negotiated Solution? As long as both the regime and its opponents seek total victory and envision a future Syrian government that excludes the other, a political settlement will remain elusive. On June 30, the Action Group on Syria endorsed the concept of a compromise agreement “formed on the basis of mutual consent” to create a national unity government, though what role the ruling Baath party would play in such a transition is uncertain. Moreover, prospects appear poor for a durable political settlement and shared long-term political vision among Syrian opposition groups. Various armed militias may make political demands that others find unacceptable, particularly with regard to Kurdish autonomy or the imposition of sharia law.

Rebel Versus Rebel? If the opposition fails to unify politically around either a civilian-led authority, military-led council, or both, competing rebel fighters may turn against each other prior to or after regime change. Should this occur, Syria’s civil war could devolve into a multi-faceted conflict, with competing groups prolonging the violence. Rebel militias could splinter along secular/Islamist divides, Arab-Kurdish lines, or based on rivalries between competing leaders.

Regional Spill-over or War? As outlined above, the conflict in Syria has already created regional security risks that could grow more serious. According to press reports, outside powers,

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8 Analysts have debated the likelihood or feasibility of Syrian Alawites seeking an autonomous zone in the western coastal highlands. See for example, Frank Salameh, “An Alawite State in Syria?” The National Interest, July 10, 2012.
such as the Arab Gulf states, Turkey, and Iran, are supporting proxies inside Syria. Syria’s neighbors or other outside actors also could choose more direct military intervention if they calculate that the conflict in Syria poses an unacceptable threat to their national security. For example, Israel, Jordan, or the United States could intervene in Syria in order to secure or destroy stockpiles of Syrian chemical weapons or missiles. Turkey could intervene if PKK-affiliated Kurdish guerrillas based there were to launch operations against the Turkish military.

U.S. Policy and Issues for Congress

U.S.-Syrian relations have been contentious for decades, but traditional U.S. concerns are now being amplified and overshadowed by the pressing need to address new threats. Since the uprising began, the Obama Administration has pursued a strategy that actively seeks President Asad’s resignation or removal; relies on partnership with regional actors to achieve that goal; and is buttressed by U.S. diplomatic, financial and humanitarian support to opposition groups and civilians. Members of Congress have debated the relative merits of the Administration’s approach alongside recurring proposals for direct U.S. military intervention or the expansion of U.S. support to opposition groups to include direct provision of weapons, ammunition, and training. In December, the Senate and House conference version of the FY2013 Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 4310 incorporated a Senate amendment (S.Amdt. 3262 to S. 3254) to require the Secretary of Defense to submit a report to congressional defense committees identifying options to “deny or significantly degrade” the Syrian military’s ability to use air power against civilians and opposition. Specifically, the report would require an assessment of the deployment of air defense systems, the establishment of no-fly zones over Syrian population centers, limited air strikes, or “other military activities.”

President Obama has remained reluctant to endorse such proposals to date for a number of reasons, including fears of exacerbating the violence and risking regional spillover; the absence of U.N. Security Council authorization for intervention; polling suggesting a lack of U.S. domestic political for more robust action; and the Syrian opposition’s continued divisions over the issue of foreign military intervention. Other foreign policy priorities have also influenced the Administration’s position, including U.S. efforts to address Iran’s nuclear program. The Administration seeks to maintain pressure on Iran through sanctions and diplomacy, and may fear U.S. intervention would unravel the limited consensus it has built with Russia, China, and others.

Critics of the Administration, including some Members of Congress, charge that U.S. hesitation to militarily intervene to protect Syrian civilians and/or help oust the Asad government has unnecessarily prolonged the fighting. Over time, critics argue, the humanitarian situation has deteriorated, violent extremist groups have seized the initiative, and Syria’s neighbors, including several U.S. partners, have been threatened. Others have argued that by failing to halt fighting in Syria, the United States and others are exacerbating already volatile Sunni-Shiite sectarian tensions throughout Middle East, which poses risks to other strategically important countries. Finally, some critics argue that U.S. credibility is being diminished by Asad’s reluctance to step down or end abuses of civilians despite U.S. demands. Others suggest that NATO’s reputation also has suffered, particularly in light of its intervention to protect Libyan civilians in 2011.

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The Obama Administration has pursued a multifaceted foreign policy since Syria’s uprising began in March 2011:

**Demanding a Political Transition, Supporting Unified Political Opposition.** On August 18, 2011, President Obama called for the resignation of Syrian President Bashar al-Asad, saying “We have consistently said that President Asad must lead a democratic transition or get out of the way. He has not led. For the sake of the Syrian people, the time has come for President Asad to step aside.” U.S. officials continue efforts improve international policy coordination and support broad-based, representative opposition groupings. A primary vehicle for U.S. policy in this regard has been the “Friends of Syria” forum. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton called for new agreements between various opposition factions in October 2012. The National Coalition (formed on November 11) has been recognized by France, Britain, Turkey, Italy, the European Union and Persian Gulf nations.

**International Diplomacy.** U.S. officials have been vocal advocates for U.N. Security Council action to condemn the Syrian government and end the bloodshed. Earlier in 2012, U.S. officials cautiously supported ceasefire and negotiation plans advanced by then-U.N.-Arab League Joint Special Envoy for Syria Kofi Annan. The U.S. government has similarly backed the efforts of new Joint Special Envoy Lakhdar Brahimi since August 2012. In December, Russia President Vladimir Putin reiterated that Russian support for the Asad regime is not absolute and stated that Russia fears that a post-Asad Syria could threaten its interests or jeopardize regional security if extremist groups remain influential. Russia and China have threatened to veto any Security Council resolution that they perceive as unduly pressuring or punishing the Asad regime. To date, the only significant international agreement on political transition in Syria that has secured Russian support is the Geneva Communique of June 30, 2012, which calls for the creation of a transitional governing body that could “include members of the present government and the opposition and other groups and shall be formed on the basis of mutual consent.” The United States has insisted that any Security Council resolution based on the plan have consequences should Asad fail to comply with its terms. See Appendix B for details.

**U.S. Sanctions.** Since the beginning of the uprising, the Obama Administration has significantly expanded U.S. sanctions against the regime and its supporters. The Treasury Department has designated dozens of individuals and entities as subject to these sanctions, freezing any U.S.-based assets of theirs and denying them access to the U.S. financial system. See Appendix C for details.

**Humanitarian Aid.** On December 12, the Obama Administration reported that the United States had provided over $209 million during FY2012 and FY2013 to address humanitarian needs in Syria and neighboring countries. This includes $81.5 million to the World Food Program (WFP); $44.5 million to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); $44.76 million to various non-governmental organizations (NGOs); $9.4 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; $11 million to the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA); $12.75 million to the U.N. Children’s Fund (UNICEF); $500,000 to the International Organization for Migration (IOM); $300,000 to the U.N. Department of Safety and Security for support of humanitarian operations; and $500,000 to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA).

**Contingency Planning.** Press reports suggest that the U.S. military has developed contingency plans for various intervention scenarios. Reportedly, such planning includes implementing a no-fly zone and protecting “proliferation-sensitive” sites should Syrian forces protecting them dissipate (see below). U.S. officials acknowledge that they are engaging with Syrian opposition leaders in order to prepare for a transition in Syria even as fighting continues on the ground. This reportedly involves security consultations as well as bringing opposition groups and representatives of Alawite communities together. In mid-2012, the U.S.-government funded U.S. Institute for Peace (USIP) convened a series of unofficial meetings in Germany with opposition groups in an effort “to define a transition process for a post-Asad Syria.”

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10. To date, the Friends of Syria have convened in Tunis (February 2012), Istanbul (April 2012), Paris (July 2012), New York (September 2012). The next meeting will take place in Marrakesh, Morocco in December 2012.
12. U.S. Agency for International Development, Syria – Complex Emergency FY2013 Fact Sheet #5, December 12, 2012. Fiscal Year (FY) of funding indicates the date of commitment or obligation, not appropriation, of funds.
Arms, Intervention, and Syria’s Opposition: Changes in U.S. Policy?

As of December 2012, several factors reportedly are motivating the Obama Administration to consider significant changes to its Syria policy, to potentially include increased financial and material support to the political and armed opposition. These factors include recent rebel gains on the ground, the formation of the Syrian opposition National Coalition, fears about chemical weapons proliferation, and the conflict’s spiraling humanitarian toll. To date, the U.S. government has remained reluctant to directly arm Syrian rebel fighters due to concerns that doing so might undermine U.S. interests by exacerbating the conflict, risking arms transfers to terrorist groups, or creating opportunities for the illegal or morally objectionable use of U.S. weaponry. Critics of intervention and arms supply proposals highlight potential risks of a security vacuum in Syria as well as risks related to arming fractious opposition forces that may include groups with extremist views or individuals who have committed human rights abuses.

Obama Administration officials have acknowledged that the United States is providing non-combatant elements of the Syrian opposition with non-lethal assistance, such as medical supplies, night-vision goggles, communications equipment, and training. These efforts have been overseen by the U.S. State Department Office of Syrian Opposition Support (OSOS). In early 2012, press reports suggested that the U.S. government lacked on-the-ground intelligence and had relied too much on regional governments for information and as interlocutors, particularly after the closure of the U.S. Embassy in Damascus. Press sources subsequently reported that President Obama reportedly issued a “Presidential Finding” permitting the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and other U.S. government agencies to provide unspecified support to Syrian rebel groups, including armed fighters. Unverified press reports allege that U.S. intelligence officers located in southern Turkey are vetting rebel groups for ties to known terrorist organizations, helping to coordinate the delivery of lethal aid to select groups, gathering intelligence on opposition networks, and establishing relationships with fighters likely to be influential as the conflict continues or in its aftermath. One report also states that Administration has debated whether to provide rebels with satellite imagery and intelligence on Syrian troop locations and movements. CRS cannot verify these reports.

As with debates over possible military intervention, proposals for the expansion of financial aid or lethal assistance to Syrian groups may raise a number of questions for potential congressional

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15 In late November 2012, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton commented on recent U.S. support for the opposition, stating “we’re going to carefully consider what more we can do.”
16 Such aid reportedly includes tools to circumvent Internet censorship, such as anonymizing software and satellite phones with GPS capabilities. According to another report, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has “supplied encryption-enabled communications gear to opposition groups, presumably enabling the United States to monitor their talks.” CRS cannot verify these reports. See, “US Provides Communications Aid for Syria Opponents,” Agence France Presse, June 14, 2012; “In Syria Conflict, U.S. Struggles to Fill Intelligence Gaps,” Washington Post, July 23, 2012.
19 Other reports state that U.S. intelligence officers, in conjunction with foreign governments, also may be helping the opposition develop logistical routes for moving supplies into Syria. Reuters, “Obama Authorizes Secret US Support for Syrian Rebels,” August 1, 2012; and, “U. S. Stepping Up Efforts To Organize Syria Rebels,” Wall Street Journal, June 14, 2012.
oversight and engagement. Specific proposals may have implications for long-standing debates about the respective constitutional and statutory war powers and foreign affairs authorities of Congress and the President.\(^21\) Proposals may also reinvigorate debate over the utility of and/or moral imperative for military intervention as a means to protect civilians and secure other U.S. interests.\(^22\) Such debates also occurred during the 112\(^{th}\) Congress’s consideration of the 2011 U.S. military intervention in Libya.

Some international leaders, including British Prime Minister David Cameron, have indicated a possible willingness to consider a scenario under which elements of the current government are preserved if Asad himself is no longer in power. Syrian opposition forces continue to differ on this issue. If similar proposals resurface or gain greater Syrian or international support, it is unclear how they might affect U.S. policy. President Asad has shown no sign of surrender and has been defiantly dismissive of multilateral efforts to form a more unified Syrian opposition. In a recent Russian television interview, President Asad remarked:

I am not a puppet. I was not made by the west to go to the west or to any other country.... I am Syrian, I was made in Syria, I have to live in Syria and die in Syria. I do not think the west is going [to intervene], but if they do so, nobody can tell what is next. I think the price of this invasion if it happened is going to be more than the whole world can afford.

### Key Security Issues

**Al Qaeda, Extremism, and Foreign Fighters**

In early 2012, U.S. officials stated that the violence and disorder paralyzing Syria was creating opportunities for Al Qaeda operatives and other violent Islamist extremists to infiltrate the country and conduct or plan attacks. According to Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, “Sunni extremists” had infiltrated Syrian opposition groups, which may be unaware of the infiltration. As of July 2012, Sunni extremist groups appear to be increasingly active in Syria, and some observers and officials fear that more groups may be sympathetic to or directly affiliated with Al Qaeda.\(^23\) Among these groups, the most prominent are the Nusra Front (Jabhat al Nusra li-Ahl al Sham, Support Front for the People of Syria),\(^24\) the Abdullah Azzam Brigades,\(^25\) and other extremist groups.

\(^{21}\) In August 2012, Congress enacted legislation clearly stating that the legislation was not intended to constitute a declaration of war on Syria or an authorization of the use of force against Syria. Section 604 of P.L. 112-158 (the Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act of 2012) states, “Nothing in this Act or the amendments made by this Act shall be construed as a declaration of war or an authorization of the use of force against Iran or Syria.”

\(^{22}\) Debate over protecting civilians reflects differences of opinion between those who embrace the principle of a so-called “responsibility to protect” and those who argue that such protection, while admirable and even desirable in some contexts, should not be endorsed in general terms because it may conflict with other U.S. interests, such as maintaining regional stability, avoiding unintended consequences of military action, and avoiding precedents that compromise future flexibility of action.


\(^{25}\) A Saudi-national named Majed al Majed reportedly leads the Azzam Brigades. OSC Report GMP20120626966212, (continued...).
the Ummah Brigade (Liwa al Ummah), and the Islam Brigade (Liwa al Islam). Other groups such as the Free Ones of the Levant Battalions (Kata’ib Ahrar al Sham) use jihadist rhetoric in some statements although their overall orientation is unclear. The Lebanon-based extremist group Fatah al Islam has released a number of statements on the conflict and members of the group are reported to be fighting (and dying) in Syria. Press reports and anecdotal accounts suggest that there may be competition for influence among extremist groups and that they lack overarching coordination or shared leadership at present.

In December 2012, the Obama Administration designated the Nusra Front as a Foreign Terrorist Organization and as an alias of Al Qaeda in Iraq pursuant to Executive Order 13224. The Iraqi government had previously expressed specific concern that individuals associated with Al Qaeda in Iraq have travelled to Syria and are using the conflict there to their advantage. Reactions from some Syrian opposition leaders and armed groups were negative. Several armed groups made statements of solidarity with Al Nusra, and prominent civilian figures, including the leader of the U.S.-backed National Coalition Moaz al Khatheeb, requested that the U.S. government reconsider the designation. According to the U.S. State Department designation announcement, “Al Nusra has sought to portray itself as part of the legitimate Syrian opposition while it is, in fact, an attempt by Al Qaeda in Iraq to hijack the struggles of the Syrian people for its own malign purposes.”

The conflict in Syria has provoked a visceral public response in the region and is encouraging some people to make donations to support the Syrian uprising or travel to Syria to support the armed opposition. Some conservative Sunni clerics have issued religious edicts characterizing the fighting as a “defensive jihad” and endorsing the provision of material support to fighters and direct participation in the fighting. Al Qaeda leaders Ayman al Zawahiri and the late Abu Yahya al Libi also released statements in 2012 urging support for Syrian fighters. European and Middle Eastern media have published estimates of the number of volunteers in the low to mid-hundreds, along with anecdotal reports about individuals from Europe, North Africa, Turkey, the Gulf states, and the Levant. Northern Lebanon and the Turkish border with northern Syria appear to be the

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most popular transit points for volunteers, presumably because of better regional air-travel linkages with Beirut and Turkish cities.

Statements from some armed groups indicate that their leaders are cognizant of the risks that certain tactics and rhetoric may pose (i.e., suicide bombing or attacks against civilians). The underlying incompatibility of different groups’ motives and intentions is difficult to ignore, particularly to the extent that some extremist groups are critical of other armed groups and may oppose efforts to establish democracy in any post-Asad Syria. The pro-sharia rhetoric and transnational orientation of some extremist groups make it possible that they may end up in conflict with secular, nationalist, or Islamist opposition elements. The prominent Syrian Salafist-Jihadist ideologue Abu Basir al Tartusi has openly rejected other jihadists’ criticism of the Free Syrian Army. While he is known for his own extremist views, even he has characterized some of the groups and individuals now active in Syria as “extremists” and “fanatics.”

As noted above, reports from Syria in late 2012 suggest that fighters in some Salafist groups have heeded warnings about an overly divisive approach and are improving coordination with potential rivals.

Securing Syrian Weapons Stockpiles

Note: For detailed CRS analysis of chemical weapons stockpiles and related questions in Syria, see CRS Report R42848, Syria’s Chemical Weapons: Issues for Congress, coordinated by Mary Beth Nikitin.

A primary concern for U.S. and other international policymakers is the Syrian military’s apparently waning control over large conventional and unconventional weapons stockpiles, including chemical weapons, shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles (MANPADs), surface-to-surface rockets, armored weapons, explosives, and small arms. In December 2012, U.S. officials reiterated public statements warning Syrian officials that the United States considers any use or transfer of Syrian chemical weapons to be a “red line” and that contingency planning has taken place for an unspecified response to such a scenario. On August 20, President Obama said,

We have been very clear to the Assad regime, but also to other players on the ground, that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus…. We’re monitoring that situation very carefully. We have put together a range of contingency plans.

On December 3, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and President Obama reiterated U.S. warnings, with Clinton stating that the use or transfer of chemical weapons is “a red line for the United States,” and President Obama saying, “I want to make it absolutely clear to Assad and those under his command: The world is watching. The use of chemical weapons is absolutely unacceptable and if you make the tragic mistake of using these weapons there will be consequences and you will be held accountable.”

(...continued)


32 “Abu Basir al Tartusi” is the pen name of Abdel Moneim Mustafa Halimah. For more on this topic, see Aron Lund, “Holier Than Thou: Rival Clerics in the Syrian Jihad,” Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor, Volume: 10, Issue: 14 July 16, 2012.
In July 2012, Syrian government spokesperson Jihad Maqdisi—who has since defected—said “any chemical or bacterial weapon will never be used—and I repeat will never be used—during the crisis in Syria regardless of the developments. These weapons are stored and secured by Syrian military forces and under its direct supervision and will never be used unless Syria faces external aggression.” Syrian Deputy Prime Minister Qadri Jamil rejected President Obama’s August statement and has accused Western powers of “looking for a pretext to intervene militarily.” In early December, the Syrian Foreign Ministry said, “Syria has stressed repeatedly that it will not use these types of weapons, if they were available, under any circumstances against its people.”

Since the crisis began in 2011, U.S. and Israeli officials have publicly communicated their assessments of and concerns about the extent, security, and potential unrest-related implications of Syria’s unconventional weapons programs and stockpiles. U.S. officials have expressed confidence that they have a reliable estimate of the quantities and locations of Syrian chemical weapons and have indicated that the “extensive network” of related facilities is being monitored “very closely” via unspecified means.33 Since late 2011, named and unnamed Israeli officials have voiced similar concerns about “huge stockpiles”34 of chemical weapons in Syria and have warned that Israel will consider any indication that the Asad regime is transferring WMD materials to Hezbollah or other non-state actors to be an act of war.35 NATO, Russia, and several other countries have underscored their intention to hold the Asad government responsible for its actions with regard to chemical weapons.

Open source reporting on Syria’s chemical weapons program suggests that nerve gas and mustard gas production and storage infrastructure is concentrated at facilities in and around Al Safira (southeast of Aleppo), Damascus, Hamah, Latakia, and Homs.36 Stockpiles also may be dispersed in other military locations around the country, and some reports suggested that the Syrian government may have moved or consolidated chemical weapons-related materials in order to better guarantee their security. As the recent discovery of undeclared chemical weapons material in Libya has shown, there are limits to the ability of international intelligence agencies and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to understand and verify the extent of sensitive WMD programs, even when dealing with countries that have ratified international conventions on WMD—which Syria has not.37

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33 On July 18, 2012, U.S. State Department spokesperson Patrick Ventrell said, “We’re closely monitoring their proliferation-sensitive materials. We don’t have any indication that those specific munitions are not under Syrian Government control at this time, but we’re monitoring it very closely.” In February 2012, Assistant Secretary of State for Verification, Compliance, and Implementation Rose Gottemoeller said, “We have ideas as to quantity. We have ideas as to where they are.” Quoted in Lachlan Carmichael, “U.S. concerned about Syrian chemical arms, missiles,” Agence France Presse (AFP), February 15, 2012. Director of National Intelligence James Clapper referred to an extensive network of Syrian chemical weapons facilities in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on February 16, 2012. See also Jay Solomon and Adam Entous, “U.S. Steps Up Watch of Syria Chemical Weapons,” Wall Street Journal, February 15, 2012; and, Jay Solomon, “U.S., Israel Monitor Suspected Syrian WMD,” Wall Street Journal, August 27, 2011.

34 Major-General Amir Eshel, head of the Israeli military’s planning division, quoted in “Israel Fears Syrian ‘Chemical, Biological’ Weapons,” NOW Lebanon, January 17, 2012.


37 Syria has signed but not ratified the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC). Syria has not signed or ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).
The Asad regime likely places greater emphasis on ensuring the loyalty of military units involved in guarding elements of WMD programs because of the weapons’ relevance as a potential deterrent against foreign attack. In the wake of any sudden regime collapse, efforts to find and secure stockpiles would be both a high priority and a difficult challenge. Neighboring intelligence services in Turkey, Jordan, and Israel may have more insight on the extent of these programs and related security challenges than the U.S. government. Elements of the Syrian military may be in a position to aid in securing materials and sites in the event of regime change, but it remains unclear whether an orderly or chaotic transition situation might ensue and whether such units would be cooperative or antagonistic toward outsiders.

Existing U.S. government authorities and funding sources for addressing emergency proliferation risks are discussed below. According to some press reports, internal U.S. government assessments estimate that as many as 75,000 military personnel could be required to fully secure various WMD-related sites in Syria. One report suggests that due to the age and probable poor condition of Syria’s chemical stockpiles, any international effort to dispose of the weapons could take years and significant numbers of troops for force protection around chemical depots.

**Outlook and Future Policy Considerations for Congress**

As the situation in Syria remains fluid and unresolved, U.S. policymakers must simultaneously plan for a possible political transition and reconstruction or civil war of unpredictable duration. Regardless of the outcome Syria is likely to face a humanitarian crisis bereft of state services and security. The prospect of a prolonged security vacuum is of particular concern, as radical Islamist militias could become more firmly entrenched, acquire more sophisticated weaponry, assert control over territory, and threaten U.S. interests. The potential proliferation or use of chemical weapons from Syria’s multiple stockpiles also is of major concern to U.S. officials. Additionally, multiple reports indicate the danger of spillover violence along Syria’s borders with Lebanon, Turkey, Israel, and Jordan. Administration officials and Members of Congress may choose to discuss alternate scenarios and relevant funding and authorization needs in anticipation of the prolonged crisis facing Syria and its neighbors.

**Possible Appropriations and Authorization Issues**

In considering and preparing for possible scenarios in Syria, Members of Congress might consider current and likely future requests for appropriations and authorization from the Administration. Syria’s economic situation was difficult prior to the conflict, and the Obama Administration expects that security and reconstruction costs in Syria will be considerable and will require international contributions. International organizations are already identifying

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38 Barbara Starr, “Military: Thousands of troops needed to secure Syrian chemical sites,” CNN.com, February 22, 2012. The President restated established U.S. policy. On July 18, 2012, U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta said, “We’ve made very clear to [the Syrian government] that they have a responsibility to safeguard their chemical sites and that we will hold them responsible should anything happen with regards to those sites.” See Secretary Panetta Remarks with United Kingdom Defense Secretary Philip Hammond, July 18, 2012; and, Remarks by the President to the White House Press Corps, August 20, 2012.

39 “Seizing Syrian chemical arms could take 75,000 troops,” International Herald Tribune, November 17, 2012.

40 CRS Specialist in Foreign Policy Legislation Dianne Rennack (ext. 7-7608) contributed to this section.

41 On August 15, 2012, State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland said, “Syria is not Iraq. It doesn’t have that great, vast natural wealth. And depending on how long this goes on, we are already seeing a lot of the economic (continued...)}
shortfalls in funding and material to respond to the humanitarian needs of Syrians affected by the conflict, and those needs, along with reconstruction costs, could drastically increase if fighting worsens and persists.

Given U.S. national security concerns about terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and the regional security effects of conflict and potential regime change in Syria, it seems likely that engagement between Congress and the Administration will continue to focus on those areas. However, as part of a transition or negotiated settlement, the U.S. government could be asked to financially support the repatriation or resettlement of Syrian refugees or to provide economic assistance to Syria through contributions at future donors’ conferences and/or through international financial institutions. The United Nations, NATO, or the Arab League could be asked to fund, staff, and equip an international peacekeeping or monitoring operation inside Syria. Congress may choose to define authorization criteria and identify potential funds for U.S. contributions to such operations, including through reviewing current recurring obligations in the Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) or Contributions to International Peacekeeping Activities (CIPA) accounts.

**Existing Restrictions and Authorities**

Syria is among those states explicitly designated in the FY2012 foreign operations appropriation act (Division I of P.L. 112-74; 125 Stat. 1164) as being prohibited from receiving direct aid (§7007; 125 Stat. 1195). However, a number of provisions in that law could make funds available “notwithstanding” other provisions within that law or other laws, including funds for nonproliferation, anti-terrorism, demining and related programs (125 Stat. 1185), foreign military financing as it applies to demining (125 Stat. 1187), contingency funds (§7034(f); 125 Stat. 1214), and democracy promotion (§7034(h); 125 Stat. 1214).

The President also is granted special authority, under Section 614 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, to “authorize the furnishing of assistance without regard to any provision of this Act, the Arms Export Control Act, any law relating to receipts and credits accruing to the United States, and any Act authorizing or appropriating funds for use under this Act” if he finds it is “important to the security interests of the United States” and so notifies Congress. Under this provision, the President could make available up to $50 million in a given fiscal year to Syria. The Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) also is authorized to provide agricultural commodities to meet emergency food needs “notwithstanding any other provision of law” pursuant to Title II of P.L. 480.

**Securing Weapons Supplies and Sites**

There are two existing authorities and likely sources of funding for U.S. government programs that could be used for efforts to secure or dismantle Syrian weapons of mass destruction or advanced conventional weapons in an emergency scenario. The State Department’s...

(...continued)

underpinnings of Syria’s prosperity at risk from this fighting. So there’s going to have to be a serious rebuilding job that will be Syrian-led obviously, but the international community has to be ready to support, so we’re beginning to think about those things.”

42 Prepared by CRS Specialist in Nonproliferation Mary Beth Nikitin, ext. 7-7745.
Nonproliferation and Disarmament Fund (NDF) has authority to spend funds “notwithstanding any other provision of law” and is authorized to work in states outside the former Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{43} The Department of Defense’s Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program has “notwithstanding” authority for use of a limited amount of CTR funds in an emergency situation, including outside the former Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{44}

**Addressing Syria’s State Sponsor of Terrorism Status**

The Administration and Congress may wish to discuss ways to address Syria’s legal status as a state sponsor of international terrorism in anticipation of any need to provide foreign assistance to a transitional Syrian government. Similarly, the designation of the Al Nusra Front as a Foreign Terrorist Organization and pursuant to E.O. 13224 may complicate U.S.-funded operations in areas under Al Nusra influence or control. Syria has long been identified as a sponsor of terrorism for the purposes of Section 620A of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 and Section 6(j) of the Export Administration Act of 1979. This status reflects long-standing Syrian government support for Hezbollah and Palestinian terrorist groups. It remains unclear how any post-Asad government might relate to those groups and other U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organizations. Since Syria has long been identified as a sponsor of terrorism for the purposes of Section 620A of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, the President may be required to either issue a national security waiver to provide certain types of assistance to a post-Asad Syrian government or to remove Syria’s designation as a state sponsor of terrorism in consultation with Congress.

Section 620A affords the President two options to remove a terrorist designation: (1) he may immediately remove a designation if there is a “fundamental change in the leadership and policies of the government” of the targeted country, and that government does not support acts of terrorism and has provided assurances that it will not in the future; or (2) he may remove a designation for a government after 45 days if that government has not supported international terrorism for a period of six months and has made assurances to not provide such support in the future.

The President is also authorized to provide assistance pursuant to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 regardless of the terrorism designation in the following instances: He may make assistance available for health and disease prevention programs, including funding for HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria treatment and prevention efforts (Section 104(c)(4)); he may provide up to $25 million in any fiscal year for unanticipated contingencies (Section 451); and to some extent he may fund international narcotics control and anticrime programs (Sections 481, 491, 492).

\textsuperscript{43} The FY2003 Consolidated Appropriations Resolution (P.L. 108-7) authorized the Department of State to use the Nonproliferation and Disarmament Fund (NDF) “for such countries other than the Independent States of the former Soviet Union and international organizations when it is in the national security interest of the United States to do so.” Appropriated NDF funds remain available until expended.

\textsuperscript{44} The “notwithstanding” authority has not been exercised since it was first authorized in Section 1305 of the FY2010 Defense Authorization bill (P.L. 111-84). Available funds are limited to ten percent of total CTR appropriations. Required determination and notification provisions would necessitate the concurrence of the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Energy. Notification of how funds will be spent must be submitted to the foreign affairs, appropriations and armed services committees. The law requires that funds are used for threats “arising from the proliferation of chemical, nuclear, and biological weapons or weapons-related materials, technologies, and expertise” that must be addressed urgently; and that “certain provisions of law would unnecessarily impede the Secretary’s ability to carry out activities of the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program of the Department of Defense to address such threats” (i.e., notwithstanding authority is necessary).
respectively). Furthermore, he may furnish defense articles or services in exchange for “necessary or strategic raw material” if he finds it in the U.S. national interest to do so (Section 663).

Under Sections 571 and 582 of the act, the President has broad authority to provide anti-terrorism and nonproliferation assistance to foreign countries notwithstanding other provisions of law, with the exception of human rights and terrorism related restrictions in Section 502B and 620A of the act. Section 620A would restrict the provision of such assistance, in addition to peacekeeping assistance under Section 551 of the act, without a national security waiver. Given the time and certification requirements for removing the designation, it is likely the Administration would seek authorization for the provision of such assistance through such a waiver.

Given the time and certification requirements for rescinding the designation of a state sponsor of international terrorism, the President may seek separate, superseding authorization from Congress for the provision of assistance to Syria, issue a national security waiver of terrorism related restrictions, or invoke existing notwithstanding authorities included in current foreign operations appropriations legislation. The Bush Administration sought and Congress granted separate authorization for Iraq in 2003 for similar reasons: President Bush rescinded Iraq’s status as a state sponsor of terrorism in May 2003 under authority granted by Congress in supplemental appropriations legislation.  

**Requested Middle East and North Africa Incentive Fund (MENA-IF)**

The Administration also has asked Congress for “notwithstanding” authorities and funds to create a Middle East and North Africa Incentive Fund (MENA-IF) for responding to Arab countries in transition through FY2017. The Administration originally requested $770 million in the fund in its FY2013 budget request. The Senate Appropriations Committee has approved $1 billion for the account, while the House Appropriations Committee has opposed it and offered instead to provide $200 million for regional stabilization efforts. Administration officials indicated during congressional briefings on the proposed fund that among the potential uses of the authorities and money would be responding to peacekeeping, nonproliferation, or transition needs in Syria. The availability or lack of MENA-IF funds and authorities may significantly affect the Administration’s approach to various contingencies in Syria.

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45 President Bush rescinded Iraq’s status as a state sponsor of terrorism pursuant to Section 1503 of P.L. 108-11 by issuing a memorandum to the Secretaries of State and Commerce and notifying Congress. Section 1503 states “that the President may make inapplicable with respect to Iraq Section 620A of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 or any other provision of law that applies to countries that have supported terrorism. …provided further that the President shall submit a notification 5 days prior to exercising any of the authorities described in this section to the Committee on Appropriations of each House of the Congress, the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate and the Committee on International Relations of the House of Representatives.” See President George W. Bush, Message to the Congress Reporting the Declaration of a National Emergency With Respect to the Development Fund for Iraq, May 22, 2003.

46 Of this $200 million, the House report specified that $70 million is for the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), $5 million is for USAID’s Office of Middle East Partnerships, and $50 million is for Jordan. The balance of funds ($75 million) presumably would be obligated in consultation with Congress for programs seeking to support regional stability.
Possible Questions for Oversight

Possible questions that Congress may wish to consider in light of recent developments include:

- What are the ultimate goals of U.S. policy toward Syria? To protect civilians? To further the opposition cause of removing President Asad from power? Can these aims be separated in principle? On the ground? What might follow Asad’s departure? Would a negotiated solution that preserved elements of the current government be acceptable to the United States? Why or why not?

- What authorities and appropriated funds might the Administration seek under various scenarios? How can existing authorities and appropriations be used to respond to various needs? What is the Administration’s view with regard to addressing Syria’s status as a state sponsor of terrorism in the event of Asad’s departure?

- How are other countries responding to the crisis? Who is willing and able to implement humanitarian or military intervention proposals? On what authority? With what specific resources or forces, for what period, and at what cost? How might direct or indirect military intervention affect ongoing relief and diplomacy initiatives?

- What potential risks and unintended consequences may stem from various intervention proposals? What are the potential risks and consequences of refusing to intervene? How will regional security be affected?

- What signals might suggest that a collapse of the Syrian regime is imminent? What signals might suggest that the current pattern of conflict by attrition will persist? What developments could trigger direct intervention by regional actors, and how should the United States respond?

- What political and security fault lines exist among Syrian opposition groups and how might various scenarios affect prospects for conflict or cooperation between them?

- What role are extremist groups playing in the violence and what might their future role be in Syria if the conflict ends? How can the United States best limit opportunities for violent extremist groups to take advantage of continued conflict or regime change in Syria?

- How can the United States prevent the use, theft, or transfer of Syria’s unconventional weapons? How can the United States and its allies prepare to secure and limit the proliferation of conventional weapons stockpiles in Syria, including missiles?

- How should the United States respond to the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people and address the impact of Syrian refugees on neighboring countries?

- What steps should the United States take in its engagement with Syrian opposition groups and regional actors to increase the likelihood of a post-conflict transition process that will lead to stability for Syria and the region? Given the fact that several Syrian secular and Islamist opposition groups share the Asad regime’s hostility to Israel, is regime change likely to improve prospects for a
Syrian-Israeli peace agreement? How likely are Syrian Kurdish groups to remain at odds with Turkey and Syrian Arabs?

- What steps is the Administration taking to help ensure that the future policies of any post-Asad government with regard to weapons of mass destruction, weapons proliferation, terrorism, and human rights are compatible with U.S. goals and interests? How credible are opposition leaders’ commitments on these issues?

- What are the risks of spillover violence in Lebanon, Turkey, Israel, and Jordan, and what steps should the United States take to eliminate or minimize these risks? Would a greater spread of violence across borders change the U.S. calculus regarding military intervention? If so, please explain how.

Legislation introduced in the 112th Congress related to Syria is summarized in Appendix A. Table C-1 in Appendix C summarizes U.S. sanctions activity since the start of the uprising in March 2011.
Appendix A. Syria Legislation in the 112th Congress

Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-158)

- P.L. 112-158/H.R. 1905, the Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act of 2012, codifies the sanctions on Syria contained in E.O.13606 and includes in Title VII, “Sanctions with Respect to Human Rights Abuses in Syria.” This section directs the President to identify and impose specified sanctions on: (1) Syrian government officials or persons acting on behalf of that government who are responsible for or complicit in the commission of serious human rights abuses against Syrian citizens or their family members, regardless of whether such abuses occurred in Syria; (2) persons who knowingly transfer or facilitate the transfer of goods or technologies (weapons, surveillance technology, or technology to restrict free speech or the flow of information) that are likely to be used by Syria to commit human rights abuses against the Syrian people; and (3) persons who engage in censorship that prohibits, limits, or penalizes freedom of expression by Syrian citizens. Section 604 states, “Nothing in this Act or the amendments made by this Act shall be construed as a declaration of war or an authorization of the use of force against Iran or Syria.”

FY2013 Appropriations and Authorization Legislation

- In report language accompanying H.R. 5857, the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2013, appropriators note under the heading “Global and Regional Programs/ Middle East Response” that “The Committee is troubled by the ongoing violence in Syria and notes that funds under this heading should continue to be made available to assist the Syrian people. All funds for Syria are subject to the notification procedures of the Committees on Appropriations, pursuant to section 7015(f) of this Act.”

- In report language accompanying the Senate version of the bill, S. 3241, appropriators recommend $2 million for the National Endowment for Democracy programs in Syria. According to the report, “The Committee recognizes the comparative advantages of the NED in the promotion of democracy and human rights abroad, particularly given its status as an NGO, unparalleled experience in promoting freedom during the cold war, and continued ability to conduct programs in the most hostile political environments.”

- House and Senate Amendments to H.R. 4310 and S. 3254, the House and Senate versions of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013. See Amendments below.

Bills

- H.R. 2105, The Iran, North Korea, and Syria Nonproliferation Reform and Modernization Act of 2011—States that it shall be U.S. policy to fully implement and enforce sanctions against Iran, North Korea, and Syria for their proliferation activities and policies. Would, among other things, prohibit U.S. nuclear
cooperation agreements and related export licenses and transfers of materials, services, and goods with a country that assists the nuclear program of Iran, North Korea, or Syria, or is transferring advanced conventional weapons to such countries.

- **H.R. 2106, The Syria Freedom Support Act**—Would, among other things, sanction the development of petroleum resources of Syria, the production of refined petroleum products in Syria, and the exportation of refined petroleum products to Syria.

- **H.R. 5993, The Syria Non-Intervention Act of 2012**—Would prohibit the use of funds available to the Department of Defense or an element of the intelligence community for the purpose of, or which would have the effect of supporting, directly or indirectly, military or paramilitary operations in Syria by any nation, group, organization, movement, or individual.

- **S. 1048, The Iran, North Korea, and Syria Sanctions Consolidation Act of 2011**—Amends the Iran, North Korea, and Syria Nonproliferation Act to include in the scope of such act a person that (1) acquired materials mined or extracted within North Korea’s territory or control; or (2) provided shipping services for the transportation of goods to or from Iran, North Korea, or Syria relating to such countries’ weapons of mass destruction programs, support for acts of international terrorism, or human rights abuses. Excludes from such provisions shipping services for emergency or humanitarian purposes.

- **S. 1472, The Syria Sanctions Act of 2011**—Denies companies that conduct business in Syria’s energy sector (investment, oil purchases, and sale of gasoline) access to U.S. financial institutions and requires federal contractors to certify that they are not engaged in sanctionable activity.

- **S. 2034, Syria Human Rights Accountability Act of 2012**—Imposes sanctions on persons who are responsible for or complicit in certain human rights abuses. Also prohibits procurement contracts with persons that export sensitive technology to Syria.

- **S. 2101, Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Human Rights Act of 2012**—Imposes, among other things, sanctions with respect to certain persons who are responsible for or complicit in human rights abuses committed against citizens of Syria or their family members.

- **S. 2152, Syria Democracy Transition Act of 2012**—Imposes, among other things, sanctions on foreign financial institutions that conduct transactions with the central bank of Syria.

- **S. 2224, To require the President to report to Congress on issues related to Syria**—Directs the President to report to Congress regarding (1) opposition groups operating inside or outside of Syria to oppose the Syrian government, and (2) the size and security of conventional and non-conventional weapons stockpiles in Syria.

- **S. 3498, Syria Humanitarian Support and Democratic Transition Assistance Act of 2012**—Makes several statements of policy regarding human rights violations, assistance to the Syrian people, weapons security, and support for transitional governance in Syria. Directs the President to appoint a Special Envoy for Syria.
Encourages the President to provide bilateral assistance in the form of relief and transition support and authorizes “such sums as may be necessary … for bilateral assistance programs in Syria” for FY2013 and FY2014. Authorizes increased funding to countries “that have experienced an influx of refugees from Syria.” Encourages the development of a transition and security plan for Syria and requires reporting on implementation.

Resolutions

- **H.Res. 296/S.Res. 180**, A resolution expressing support for peaceful demonstrations and universal freedoms in Syria and condemning the human rights violations by the Asad Regime—Among other things, it urges the “President to continue to work with the European Union, the Government of Turkey, the Arab League, the Gulf Cooperation Council, and other allies and partners to bring an end to human rights abuses in Syria, hold the perpetrators accountable, and support the aspirations of the people of Syria.”

- **H.Res. 632**, A resolution that, among other things, commends the leadership of the Government of Turkey in calling for an end to the violence in Syria and for its responsiveness to the humanitarian needs of Syrian refugees.

- **H.Res. 687**, A resolution that, among other things, calls on the United Nations Security Council, based on evidence that crimes against humanity have been perpetrated by Syrian government forces, to refer the situation of Syria to the International Criminal Court.

- **H.Res. 763**, A resolution that, among other things, calls on all parties in the conflict in Syria to respect the human rights and religious freedom of Syrian citizens.

- **H.Res. 770**, Expresses the sense of the House of Representatives that (1) only Congress has the constitutional authority to declare war, (2) President Obama should set clear objectives for the U.S. Armed Forces before sending them into battle, (3) President Obama should indicate a direct national security interest in placing the U.S. Armed Forces in harm’s way, and (4) the government of Syria has surrendered all claims of legitimacy by massacring its own people and should peacefully transfer power to a democratically elected government.

- **S.Res. 370/H.Res. 549**, calling for democratic change in Syria, would state the Senate’s condemnation of “ongoing, widespread, and systemic violations of human rights conducted by authorities in Syria” and calls on Bashar al Asad to step down. The non-binding resolution would urge the President to support a democratic transition in Syria, establish a Friends of Syria Contact Group, develop a strategy to encourage further military defections, and “develop a plan to identify weapons stockpiles and prevent the proliferation of conventional, biological, chemical, and other types of weapons in Syria.”

- **S.Res. 379**, A resolution that, among other things, expresses strong disappointment with the Governments of the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China for their veto of the United Nations Security Council resolution condemning Bashar al Asad and the violence in Syria and urges them to reconsider their votes.
• S.Res. 391/H.Res. 629, A resolution that, among other things, calls on Syria to (1) open the country to independent and foreign journalists; and (2) release all detained journalists, videographers, and bloggers.

• S.Res. 424, A resolution that, among other things, supports calls by Arab leaders to provide the people of Syria with the means to defend themselves against Bashar al-Assad and his forces, including through the provision of weapons and other material support, and calls on the President to work closely with regional partners to implement these efforts effectively; urges the President to take all necessary precautions to ensure that any support for the Syrian opposition does not benefit individuals in Syria who are aligned with al Qaeda or associated movements, or who have committed human rights abuses; and affirms that the establishment of safe havens for people from Syria, as contemplated by governments in the Middle East, would be an important step to save Syrian lives and to help bring an end to Mr. Assad’s killing of civilians in Syria, and calls on the President to consult urgently and thoroughly with regional allies on whether, how, and where to create such safe havens.

• S.Res. 428, A resolution that, among other things, urges the President to formally establish the Atrocities Prevention Board established by Presidential Study Directive-10 in August 2011, and for the Board to provide recommendations to the President concerning the prevention of mass atrocities in Syria.

• S.Res. 435, A resolution that, among other things, strongly urges all Governments, including the Republic of Belarus and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, to refrain from providing any additional military or security assistance to the Government of Syria.

• S.Res. 494, A resolution that, among other things, condemns the Government of the Russian Federation for its long-standing and ongoing support for the criminal regime of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

Amendments

• H.Amdt. 1131 to H.R. 4310, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013, agreed in the House of Representatives May 18, 2012, an amendment to limit the availability of funds for Cooperative Threat Reduction activities with Russia until the Secretary of Defense can certify that Russia is no longer supporting the Syrian regime and is not providing to Syria, North Korea, or Iran any equipment or technology that contributes to weapons of mass destruction programs.

• S.Amdt. 3262 to S. 3254, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013, agreed to in the Senate December 4, 2012, and incorporated in the conference bill H.R. 4310, an amendment to require the Secretary of Defense to submit a report to congressional defense committees identifying options to “deny or significantly degrade” the Syrian military’s ability to use air power against civilians and the opposition. Specifically, the report would require an assessment of the deployment of air defense systems, the establishment of no-fly zones, limited air strikes, or “other military activities.”

• Section 1295 of H.R. 4310, the conference version of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013, would require the Administration to
provide a report within 90 days of enactment on military assistance provided by
the Russian Federation to Syria.
Appendix B. Chronology of United Nations Action on Syria

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Action</th>
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<tr>
<td>August 3, 2011</td>
<td>The Security Council issued a presidential statement that expressed profound regret over hundreds of deaths in Syria, condemned widespread violations of human rights against civilians by Syrian authorities, and called for an immediate end to violence in Syria, urging all sides to act with utmost restraint. It also called for access for humanitarian workers for Syrian authorities to follow through on commitments they had made to reform. Lebanon disassociated itself from the statement after its release.</td>
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<td>October 4, 2011</td>
<td>The Security Council failed to adopt a resolution that would have, among other things, voiced deep concern over violence in Syria and strongly condemned “the continued grave and systematic human rights violations and the use of force against civilians by the Syrian authorities.” It called for “an inclusive Syrian-led political process conducted in an environment free from violence, fear, intimidation and extremism, and aimed at effectively addressing the legitimate aspirations and concerns of Syria’s population.” Russia and China voted against the resolution, and Brazil, India, Lebanon, and South Africa abstained.</td>
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<td>February 4, 2012</td>
<td>The Security Council failed to adopt a resolution that would have, among other things, adopted an Arab League plan outlining a Syrian-led political transition to a democratic, plural political system. The resolution had called on the Syrian government to cease violence against civilians, withdraw its armed forces from cities and towns and return them to their barracks, guarantee the freedom of peaceful demonstrations, and allow unhindered access for all Arab League institutions to “determine the truth about the situation on the ground and monitor the incidents taking place.” Russia and China voted against the resolution.</td>
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<td>February 23, 2012</td>
<td>United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Secretary-General of the League of Arab States Nabil Elaraby appointed Kofi Annan as United Nations-League of Arab States Joint Special Envoy for Syria.</td>
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<td>April 5, 2012</td>
<td>The Security Council issued another presidential statement that, among other things, noted the Syrian government commitment on March 25, 2012, to implement Kofi Annan’s six-point peace proposal. The statement also called upon the Syrian government to implement an U.N.-brokered cease-fire by withdrawing troops from population centers by April 10, 2012. It also called upon all parties, including the Syrian opposition, to cease all armed violence no later than April 12, 2012.</td>
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<td>April 14, 2012</td>
<td>The Security Council passed Resolution 2042, which approved the deployment of a U.N. advance team of 30 military observers to Syria. It also demanded that the Syrian authorities withdraw security forces from population centers and begin a dialogue with the opposition. The vote marked the first time since protests began that the Security Council was united in demanding a halt to the violence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 21, 2012</td>
<td>The Security Council passed Resolution 2043, which established—a United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) with an initial deployment of up to 300 unarmed military observers under the command of a Chief Military Observer. The resolution also created a civilian team to help implement elements of the full peace plan, such as the start of a national political dialogue and the government’s granting of the right to demonstrate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 16, 2012</td>
<td>UNSMIS Commander Norwegian Major General Robert Mood suspended observation patrols due to increased violence.</td>
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<td>July 19, 2012</td>
<td>The Security Council failed to adopt a proposed resolution that would have, among other things, threatened sanctions on Syria if demands to end the violence were not met. Permanent members China and Russia voted against the resolution and Pakistan and South Africa abstained. The resolution would have had the Security Council iss...</td>
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Council act under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter to demand verifiable compliance—within 10 days of the adoption—with its demands in previous resolutions that Syrian authorities pull back military concentrations from population centers and cease the use of heavy weaponry against them.

July 20, 2012  
The Security Council passed UNSCR 2059 which extended the UNSMIS mission for an additional 30 days. It also conditioned any further renewal of UNSMIS on the cessation of the use of heavy weapons by the government and a reduction in violence by all sides.

August-September 2012  
United Nations-League of Arab States Joint Special Envoy for Syria, Kofi Annan announced his intention to resign upon the expiration of his mandate on August 31, 2012. Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi replaces Annan as Joint Special Envoy and begins diplomatic engagement with international parties and the Asad government.

October 2012  
Brahimi proposes a ceasefire linked to the Islamic holiday of Eid al Adha that is considered and adopted by the government and some opposition groups, but quickly breaks down.

November-December 2012  
Brahimi warns that state failure may result from continued fighting in Syria and renews calls for a negotiated political solution based on the July 2012 communique of the Action Group on Syria.47 U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon reports his concern “that the presence of armed members of the opposition and the ongoing military activities of the Syrian security forces [in the Golan Heights area] have the potential to ignite a larger conflict between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic with grave consequences.” The United Nations suspends operations in Syria on December 3, citing deteriorating security conditions.

On December 19, the United Nations, humanitarian organizations, and the government of Syria released estimates and appeals for assistance for Syrian refugees as well as those displaced or otherwise in need in Syria. A U.N. Syria Regional Response Plan seeks $1 billion for Syrian refugees through the first half of 2013. A U.N. Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan for Syria, prepared in part by the government of Syria, seeks $519 million to support Syrians affected by the conflict through the first half of 2013.

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Appendix C. U.S. Sanctions on Syria

Overview

At present, a variety of legislative provisions and executive directives prohibit U.S. aid to Syria and restrict bilateral trade. Syria remains a U.S.-designated State Sponsor of Terrorism and is therefore subject to a number of general U.S. sanctions. Syria was placed on the State Department’s State Sponsors of Terrorism List in 1979. Moreover, between 2003 and 2006 Congress passed legislation and President Bush issued new executive orders that expanded U.S. sanctions specifically on Syria.

- The table below reviews sanctions introduced since early 2011 in response to Syria’s uprising.
- Syria-specific sanctions and general sanctions applicable to Syria are also summarized below.

Background on U.S. Assistance to Syria and Restrictions

Because of a number of legal restrictions and U.S. sanctions, many resulting from Syria’s designation as a country supportive of international terrorism, Syria is no longer eligible to receive U.S. foreign assistance. Between 1950 and 1981, the United States provided a total of $627.4 million in aid to Syria: $34.0 million in development assistance, $438.0 million in economic support, and $155.4 million in food assistance. Most of this aid was provided during a brief warming trend in bilateral relations between 1974 and 1979. Significant projects funded with U.S. assistance included water supply, irrigation, rural roads and electrification, and health and agricultural research. No aid has been provided to Syria since 1981, when the last aid programs were closed out. In the event of regime change, the Obama Administration and Congress would need to reevaluate any successor government’s policies with regard to support for international terrorism in order to determine Syria’s potential eligibility for U.S. assistance.

Syria’s Economy and Sanctions

Reports indicate that the Syrian economy and national budget are suffering due to a steep drop in oil exports resulting from sanctions; over a year of domestic unrest and the loss of tourism revenues; and new social and military spending aimed at quelling public anger. Estimates vary on the degree of contraction in 2011, ranging between 5% and 15%. The Economist Intelligence Unit predicts that the Syrian economy will contract by 8.1% in 2012.

Urban areas are now experiencing daily power outages and fuel shortages; inflation is rising; and the value of the Syrian pound has plummeted on the black market (from 54 pounds against

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49 In May 2012, the Syrian government raised the price of subsidized fuel by 25%, just weeks after doubling electricity prices.
50 Inflation may be as high as 30% in Syria. According to a June 2012 report, the Syrian government has recently circulated new currency printed in Russia in order to pay public sector salaries amidst a ballooning fiscal deficit. See, “Syria Prints New Money as Deficit Grows-Bankers,” Reuters, June 13, 2012.
the dollar to over 103 pounds as of early March), forcing the government to spend resources proping it up. Syria’s stock market is down 40% since the unrest began in March 2011. Foreign exchange reserves held by the Syrian Central Bank have reportedly fallen from $18 billion in the fall of 2011 to between $5 billion and $10 billion, and now lose about $1 billion a month. With the loss of European export markets due to a European Union oil import ban, Syria has been denied a major source of revenue and hard currency (25%-30% of total government revenue or $4 billion a year). According to Syrian Oil Minister Sufian Alao, sanctions on Syrian oil exports have cost the country $4 billion.

Before sanctions, the main buyers of approximately 150,000 barrels per day (bpd) of exported Syrian oil were Italy, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Austria, Spain, and Turkey. Syria produces about 380,000 bpd total, though 2011 total production fell to around 320,000 bpd due to sanctions. Foreign oil companies that have suspended operations in Syria include Tatneft (Russia), Royal Dutch/Shell Group, Total (France), Gulf Sands (UK), Suncor (Canada), and INA (Croatia). In March 2012, Syrian officials announced that the Russian energy company Gazprom would take over INA’s oil and gas operations in Syria. The operating status of two Chinese companies with investments in Syria, CNPC and Sinopec, is unknown. Western countries also have banned new investment in Syria’s oil and gas sector, and energy traders and shipping firms also report changes to their engagement with Syria. European sanctions do not ban the export of liquid petroleum gas (LPG) to Syria, since it is widely used by ordinary households for heating and cooking.

Since new sanctions were enacted, many analysts have speculated about whether new investors and new foreign markets would arise for Syrian oil exports, albeit at lower prices due to sanctions and increased shipping, insurance, and financing costs. Some experts believe that both India and China are in a position to refine the heavy crude that Syria exports. However, others assert that some Asian buyers would find the prospect of purchasing Syrian oil too risky or politically problematic. In recent months, Venezuela has supplied Syria with at least three shipments of diesel fuel in exchange for Syrian naphtha, a refined petroleum product. According to Venezuelan Energy Minister Rafael Ramirez, “We have a high level of cooperation with Syria, a besieged nation, whom the transnational interests want to bring down.” Other reports suggest that Russia and Iran are exporting gasoil and diesel to Syria. Syrian officials also claim to be negotiating fuel import deals with Russia, Iran, and Algeria.

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52 Though oil production declined in 2011, natural gas production increased by 8% due to investment in gas infrastructure made before unrest began.

53 “Syria: Voting with their feet,” Economist Intelligence Unit—Business Middle East, January 16, 2012.

54 “How Russia, Iran keep fuel flowing to Syria,” Reuters, April 26, 2012.

### Table C-1. U.S. Sanctions Against Syria in 2011-2012
(Implemented by Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control [OFAC])

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Sanctioned Individual/Entity</th>
<th>Sanction or Related Activity Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 11, 2012</td>
<td>Two senior leaders of the Syria-based Al Nusra Front, Maysar Ali Musa Abdallah al-Juburi and Anas Hasan Khattab, for acting on behalf of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).</td>
<td>Added to OFAC’s Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) List pursuant to Executive Order 13224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 11, 2012</td>
<td>Jaysh al-Sha’bi and Shabiha (two armed militia groups that operate under the control of the Syrian government) and two Shabiha commanders Ayman Jaber and Mohammed Jaber</td>
<td>Added to OFAC’s Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) List pursuant to Executive Orders 13572 and 13582 variously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 19, 2012</td>
<td>Amr Armanazi, director of Syria’s Scientific Studies Research Center, Army Supply Bureau, involved in missile procurement, and Belarus-based Belvneshpromservice</td>
<td>Added to OFAC’s Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 14, 2012</td>
<td>Hasan Nasrallah, Hezbollah’s Secretary General, is being designated pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13582, for providing support to the Syrian government.</td>
<td>Added to OFAC’s Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) List, pursuant to E.O.13582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 14, 2012</td>
<td>Riyad Hijab, former Prime Minister</td>
<td>Post-defection removal from OFAC’s Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 10, 2012</td>
<td>Hezbollah, SYTROL</td>
<td>Added to OFAC’s Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) List, pursuant to E.O.13582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Sanctioned Individual/Entity</td>
<td>Sanction or Related Activity Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 18, 2012</td>
<td>Omran Ahed Al-Zoubi, Minister of Information; Subhi Ahmad Al-Abdullah, Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform; Safwan Al-Assaf, Minister of Housing and Urban Development; Wael Nader Al-Halqi, Minister of Health; Mohammad Al-Jleilati, Minister of Finance; Hala Al Nasser, Minister of Tourism; Mohammad Abdul-Sattar Al-Sayyed, Minister of Religious Endowments; Yasser Al-Sibaei, Minister of Public Works; Hazwan Al Wazz, Minister of Education; Mansour Fadllallah Azzam, Minister of Presidential Affairs; Nazira Farah Sarkis, Minister of State for Environmental Affairs; Hussein Mahmoud Farzat, Minister of State; Omar Ibrahim Ghalawanji, Deputy Prime Minister for Services Affairs; Radwan Habib, Minister of Justice; Ali Haidar, Minister of State for National Reconciliation Affairs; Bassam Hanna, Minister of Water Resources; Riyadh Hijab, Prime Minister; Mahmoud Ibrahim Said, Minister of Transport; Qadri Jamil, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs; Imad Mohammad Deeb Khamis, Minister of Electricity; Adib Mayaleh, Governor of Central Bank of Syria; Jassim Mohammad Zakarya, Minister of Social Affairs and Labor; Lubanah Mshaweh, Minister of Culture; Said Mu’zi Hneidi, Minister of Oil and Mineral Resources; Imad Abdul-Ghani Sabouni, Minister of Communications and Technology; Fuad Shukri Kurdi, Minister of Industry; Joseph Jurji Sweid, Minister of State; Mohammad Yehya Moalla, Minister of Higher Education; Mohammad Zafer Mihbek, Minister of Economy and Foreign Trade Business Lab, Drex Technologies (Virgin Islands), Handasieh, Industrial Solutions, Mechanical Construction Factory, Syronics</td>
<td>Added to OFAC’s Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 30, 2012</td>
<td>Syria International Islamic Bank</td>
<td>Added to OFAC’s Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1, 2012</td>
<td>Foreign Persons/Foreign Entities that have violated, attempted to violate, conspired to violate, or caused a violation of U.S. sanctions against Iran or Syria, or that have facilitated deceptive transactions for persons subject to U.S. sanctions concerning Syria or Iran.</td>
<td>Executive Order 13608—Authorizes the Department of the Treasury to publicly identify foreign individuals and entities that have violated U.S. sanctions against Iran and Syria and generally bars their access to U.S. financial and commercial systems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 27, 2012</td>
<td>OFAC issued General License 4A, which authorizes the exports or re-exports to Syria of items licensed or otherwise authorized by the Department of Commerce and of exports and reexports of certain services. General License 4A replaces and supersedes General License 4, dated August 18, 2011.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Sanctioned Individual/Entity</td>
<td>Sanction or Related Activity Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 23, 2012</td>
<td>Governments of Syria and Iran, Ali Mamluk (Director of the Syrian General Intelligence Directorate), Syrian General Intelligence Directorate, Syriatel, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security, Law Enforcement Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Datak Telecom</td>
<td>Executive Order 13606—Blocks the property and suspends entry into the United States of certain persons with respect to grave human rights abuses by the governments of Iran and Syria via information technology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 30, 2012</td>
<td>General Munir Adanov (Deputy Chief of General Staff of the Syrian Army), General Dawood Rajiha (Minister of Defense)</td>
<td>Added to OFAC’s Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 5, 2012</td>
<td>General Organization of Radio and TV</td>
<td>Added to OFAC’s Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 23, 2012</td>
<td></td>
<td>OFAC issued General License 15 related to Syria to authorize transactions in connection with patent, trademark, copyright, or other intellectual property protection that would otherwise be prohibited by Executive Order 13582.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 16, 2012</td>
<td>Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security</td>
<td>Added to OFAC’s Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1, 2011</td>
<td>Muhammad Makhluf, Military Housing Establishment, Real Estate Bank</td>
<td>Added to OFAC’s Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 3, 2011</td>
<td></td>
<td>OFAC issued two general licenses related to Syria to authorize payments in connection with overflight or emergency landing and transactions with respect to telecommunications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 27, 2011</td>
<td></td>
<td>OFAC issued a general license related to Syria to authorize third-country diplomatic and consular funds transfers and to authorize certain services in support of nongovernmental organizations’ activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 9, 2011</td>
<td></td>
<td>OFAC issued four general licenses related to Syria to authorize wind down transactions, certain official activities of international organizations, incidental transactions related to U.S. persons residing in Syria and operation of accounts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 30, 2011</td>
<td>Walid Mouallem (Foreign Minister), Ali Abdul Karim Ali (Syrian Ambassador to Lebanon), Bouthaina Shaaban (Advisor to the President)</td>
<td>Added to OFAC’s Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 18, 2011</td>
<td>Government of Syria</td>
<td>Executive Order 13582—Freezes all assets of the Government of Syria, prohibits U.S. persons from engaging in any transaction involving the Government of Syria, bans U.S. imports of Syrian-origin petroleum or petroleum products, prohibits U.S. persons from having any dealings in or related to Syria’s petroleum or petroleum products, and prohibits U.S. persons from operating or investing in Syria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Sanctioned Individual/Entity</td>
<td>Sanction or Related Activity Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 18, 2011</td>
<td>General Petroleum Corporation, Syrian Company For Oil Transport, Syrian Gas Company, Syrian Petroleum Company, Sytrol</td>
<td>Added to OFAC’s SDN List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 10, 2011</td>
<td>Commercial Bank of Syria and its Lebanon-based subsidiary, Syrian Lebanese Commercial Bank, Syriatel, the country’s main mobile phone operator</td>
<td>Added to OFAC’s SDN List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 4, 2011</td>
<td>Muhammad Hamsho (businessman with ties to Asad family), Hamsho International Group</td>
<td>Added to OFAC’s SDN List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 29, 2011</td>
<td>Jamil Hassan (Head of Air Force Intelligence), Political Security Directorate (PSD, domestic intelligence)</td>
<td>Added to OFAC’s SDN List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 18, 2011</td>
<td>President Bashar al Asad, Farouk al Shara (vice president), Adel Safar (prime minister), Mohammad Ibrahim al Shaar (minister of the interior), Ali Habib Mahmoud (minister of defense), Abdul Fatah Qudsiya (head of Syrian military intelligence), Mohammed Dib Zaitoun (director of political security directorate), Nabil Rafik al Kuzbari, General Mohsen Chizari (Commander of Iran Revolutionary Guard Corp Qods Force suspected of human rights abuses in Syria), Al Mashreq Investment Fund, Bena Properties, Cham Holding, Syrian Air Force Intelligence, Syrian Military Intelligence, Syrian National Security Bureau</td>
<td>Executive Order 13573 adds listed individuals and entities to OFAC’s SDN List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 29, 2011</td>
<td>Maher al Asad, Ali Mamluk (director of the Syrian General Intelligence Directorate GID), Atif Najib (former head of the Syrian Political Security Directorate for Dara’a province and the president’s cousin), the General Intelligence Directorate, and Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force (for allegedly assisting Syria in its crackdown)</td>
<td>Executive Order 13572 adds listed individuals and entities to OFAC’s SDN List</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** U.S. Treasury Department.

**Notes:** As part of its enforcement efforts, OFAC publishes a list of individuals and companies owned or controlled by, or acting for or on behalf of, targeted countries. It also lists individuals, groups, and entities, such as terrorists and narcotics traffickers designated under programs that are not country-specific. Collectively, such individuals and companies are called Specially Designated Nationals or SDNs. Their assets are blocked and U.S. persons are generally prohibited from dealing with them.

a. According to the Treasury Department, Drex Technologies, “belongs to Assad’s billionaire cousin and government insider, Rami Makhluf, who was designated by the Treasury Department in February 2008 under E.O. 13460 for improperly benefiting from and aiding the public corruption of Syrian regime officials. Drex Technologies was designated pursuant to E.O. 13572, which authorizes the United States to sanction any entities owned or controlled by persons designated under E.O. 13460.”

**Specific Sanctions Against Syria**

Specific U.S. sanctions levied against Syria fall into three main categories: (1) sanctions resulting from the passage of the 2003 Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Act (SALSA) that, among other things, prohibit most U.S. exports to Syria; (2) sanctions imposed by executive order from the President that specifically deny certain Syrian citizens and entities access to the U.S. financial system due to their participation in proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; association with Al Qaeda, the Taliban, or Osama bin Laden; or destabilizing activities in Iraq and...
Lebanon; and (3) sanctions resulting from the USA PATRIOT Act levied specifically against the Commercial Bank of Syria in 2006.

The 2003 Syria Accountability Act

On December 12, 2003, President Bush signed H.R. 1828, the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act into law, as P.L. 108-175. This law requires the President to impose penalties on Syria unless it ceases support for international terrorist groups, ends its occupation of Lebanon, ceases the development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and has ceased supporting or facilitating terrorist activity in Iraq (§5(a) and 5(d)). Sanctions include bans on the export of military items (already banned under other legislation, see above) and of dual use items (items with both civil and military applications) to Syria (§5(a)(1)). In addition, the President is required to impose two or more sanctions from a menu of six:

- a ban on all exports to Syria except food and medicine;
- a ban on U.S. businesses operating or investing in Syria;
- a ban on landing in or overflight of the United States by Syrian aircraft;
- reduction of diplomatic contacts with Syria;
- restrictions on travel by Syrian diplomats in the United States; and
- blocking of transactions in Syrian property (§5(a)(2)).

Implementation

On May 11, 2004, President Bush issued Executive Order 13338, implementing the provisions of P.L. 108-175, including the bans on munitions and dual use items (§5(a)(1)) and two sanctions from the menu of six listed in Section 5(a)(2). The two sanctions he chose were the ban on exports to Syria other than food and medicine (§5(a)(2)(A)) and the ban on Syrian aircraft landing in or overflying the United States (§5(a)(2)(D)). In issuing his executive order, the President stated that Syria has failed to take significant, concrete steps to address the concerns that led to the enactment of the Syria Accountability Act. The President also imposed two additional sanctions based on other legislation.

- Under Section 311 of the USA PATRIOT Act, he instructed the Treasury Department to prepare a rule requiring U.S. financial institutions to sever correspondent accounts with the Commercial Bank of Syria because of money laundering concerns.
- Under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), he issued instructions to freeze assets of certain Syrian individuals and government entities involved in supporting policies inimical to the United States.

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56 Syria’s inclusion on the State Sponsors of Terrorism List as well as SALSA requires the President to restrict the export of any items to Syria that appear on the U.S. Munitions List (weapons, ammunition) or Commerce Control List (dual-use items).
Waivers

In the executive order and in an accompanying letter to Congress, President Bush cited the waiver authority contained in Section 5(b) of the Syria Accountability Act and stated that he wished to issue the following waivers on grounds of national security.

Regarding Section 5(a)(1) and 5(a)(2)(A): The following exports are permitted: products in support of activities of the U.S. government; medicines otherwise banned because of potential dual use; aircraft parts necessary for flight safety; informational materials; telecommunications equipment to promote free flow of information; certain software and technology; products in support of U.N. operations; and certain exports of a temporary nature.57

Regarding Section 5(a)(2)(D): The following operations are permitted: takeoff/landing of Syrian aircraft chartered to transport Syrian officials on official business to the United States; takeoff/landing for non-traffic and non-scheduled stops; takeoff/landing associated with an emergency; and overflights of U.S. territory.

Targeted Financial Sanctions

Since the initial implementation of the Syria Accountability Act (in Executive Order 13338 dated May 2004), the President has repeatedly taken action to sanction individual members of the Asad regime’s inner circle.58 E.O. 13338 declared a national emergency with respect to Syria and authorized the Secretary of the Treasury to block the property of individual Syrians. Based on Section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1622(d)), the President has annually extended his authority to block the property of individual Syrians (latest on April 29, 2011). When issuing each extension, the President has noted that the actions and policies of the government of Syria continued to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat.59

The following individuals and entities have been targeted by the U.S. Treasury Department (Office of Foreign Assets Control or OFAC):

- On June 30, 2005, the U.S. Treasury Department designated two senior Syrian officials involved in Lebanon affairs, Syria’s then-interior minister and its head of military intelligence in Lebanon (respectively, the late General Kanaan and General Ghazali), as Specially Designated Nationals, thereby freezing any assets they may have in the United States and banning any U.S. persons, including U.S.

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57 According to U.S. regulations, any product that contains more than 10% de minimis U.S.-origin content, regardless of where it is made, is not allowed to be exported to Syria. For U.S. commercial licensing prohibitions on exports and re-exports to Syria, see 15 C.F.R. pt. 736 Supp. No. 1. The Department of Commerce reviews license applications on a case-by-case basis for exports or re-exports to Syria under a general policy of denial. For a description of items that do not require export licenses, see, Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS), U.S. Department of Commerce, Implementation of the Syria Accountability Act, available at http://www.bis.doc.gov/licensing/syriaimplementationmay14_04.htm.

58 According to the original text of E.O. 13338, the President’s authority to declare a national emergency authorizing the blocking of property of certain persons and prohibiting the exportation or re-exportation of certain goods to Syria is based on “The Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, including the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (50 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.) (IEEPA), the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1601 et seq.) (NEA), the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003, P.L. 108-175 (SAA), and Section 301 of Title 3, United States Code.” available at http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Documents/13338.pdf.

59 The President last extended the State of Emergency on April 29, 2011.
financial institutions outside of the United States, from conducting transactions with them.\(^{60}\) Kanaan allegedly committed suicide in October 2005, though some have speculated that he may have been murdered.

- On January 18, 2006, the U.S. Treasury Department took the same actions against the President’s brother-in-law, Assef Shawkat, chief of military intelligence.

- On April 26, 2006, President Bush issued Executive Order 13399 that authorized the Secretary of the Treasury to freeze the U.S.-based assets of anyone found to be involved in the February 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. It also affects anyone involved in bombings or assassinations in Lebanon since October 2004, or anyone hindering the international investigation into the Hariri assassination. The order allows the United States to comply with UNSCR 1636, which calls on all states to freeze the assets of those persons designated by the investigating commission or the government of Lebanon to be involved in the Hariri assassination.

- On August 15, 2006, the U.S. Treasury Department froze assets of two other senior Syrian officers: Major General Hisham Ikhtiyar, for allegedly contributing to Syria’s support of foreign terrorist organizations including Hezbollah; and Brigadier General Jama’a Jama’a, for allegedly playing a central part in Syria’s intelligence operations in Lebanon during the Syrian occupation.\(^{61}\)

- On January 4, 2007, the U.S. Treasury Department designated three Syrian entities, the Syrian Higher Institute of Applied Science and Technology, the Electronics Institute, and the National Standards and Calibration Laboratory, as weapons proliferators under an executive order (E.O. 13382) based on the authority vested to the President under IEEPA. The three state-sponsored institutions are divisions of Syria’s Scientific Studies and Research Center, which was designated by President Bush as a weapons proliferator in June 2005 for research on the development of biological and chemical weapons.\(^{62}\)

- On August 1, 2007, the President issued E.O. 13441\(^{63}\) blocking the property of persons undermining the sovereignty of Lebanon or its democratic processes and institutions. On November 5, 2007, the U.S. Treasury Department designated four individuals reportedly affiliated with the Syrian regime’s efforts to reassert Syrian control over the Lebanese political system, including Assaad Halim Hardan, Wi’am Wahhab, and Hafiz Makhluf (under the authority of E.O. 13441) and Muhammad Nasif Khayrbik (under the authority of E.O. 13338).\(^{64}\)


On February 13, 2008, President Bush issued another order (E.O.13460) blocking the property of senior Syrian officials. According to the U.S. Treasury Department, the order “targets individuals and entities determined to be responsible for or who have benefitted from the public corruption of senior officials of the Syrian regime.” The order also revises a provision in Executive Order 13338 to block the property of Syrian officials who have undermined U.S. and international efforts to stabilize Iraq. One week later, under the authority of E.O. 13460, the U.S. Treasury Department froze the U.S. assets and restricted the financial transactions of Rami Makhluf, a powerful cousin of President Bashar al Asad.

Sanctions Against the Commercial Bank of Syria

As previously mentioned, under Section 311 of the USA PATRIOT Act, President Bush instructed the Treasury Department in 2004 to prepare a rule requiring U.S. financial institutions to sever correspondent accounts with the Commercial Bank of Syria because of money laundering concerns. In 2006, the Treasury Department issued a final ruling that imposes a special measure against the Commercial Bank of Syria as a financial institution of primary money laundering concern. It bars U.S. banks and their overseas subsidiaries from maintaining a correspondent account with the Commercial Bank of Syria, and it also requires banks to conduct due diligence that ensures the Commercial Bank of Syria is not circumventing sanctions through its business dealings with them.

General Sanctions Applicable to Syria

The International Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Act of 1976 (P.L. 94-329). Section 303 of this act (90 Stat. 753-754) required termination of foreign assistance to countries that aid or abet international terrorism. This provision was incorporated into the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 as Section 620A (22 USC 2371). (Syria was not affected by this ban until 1979, as explained below.)

The International Emergency Economic Powers Act of 1977 (Title II of P.L. 95-223, codified at 50 U.S.C. §1701 et seq.) Under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), the President has broad powers pursuant to a declaration of a national emergency with respect to a threat “which has its source in whole or substantial part outside the United States, to the national security, foreign policy, or economy of the United States.” These powers include the ability to seize foreign assets under U.S. jurisdiction, to prohibit any transactions in foreign exchange, to prohibit payments between financial institutions involving foreign currency, and to prohibit the import or export of foreign currency.

The Export Administration Act of 1979 (P.L. 96-72). Section 6(i) of this act (93 Stat. 515) required the Secretary of Commerce and the Secretary of State to notify Congress before licensing export of goods or technology valued at more than $7 million to countries determined to

65 A previous executive order, E.O. 13315, blocks property of former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and members of his former regime. On June 9, 2005, the Treasury Department blocked property and interests of a Syrian company, SES International Corp., and two of its officials under the authority of E.O.13315.

have supported acts of international terrorism. (Amendments adopted in 1985 and 1986 relettered Section 6(i) as 6(j) and lowered the threshold for notification from $7 million to $1 million.)

A by-product of these two laws was the so-called state sponsors of terrorism list. This list is prepared annually by the State Department in accordance with Section 6(j) of the Export Administration Act. The list identifies those countries that repeatedly have provided support for acts of international terrorism. Syria has appeared on this list ever since it was first prepared in 1979; it appears most recently in the State Department’s annual publication Country Reports on Terrorism, 2009, issued on August 5, 2010. Syria’s inclusion on this list in 1979 triggered the above-mentioned aid sanctions under P.L. 94-329 and trade restrictions under P.L. 96-72.

Omnibus Diplomatic Security and Antiterrorism Act of 1986 (P.L. 99-399). Section 509(a) of this act (100 Stat. 853) amended Section 40 of the Arms Export Control Act to prohibit export of items on the munitions list to countries determined to be supportive of international terrorism, thus banning any U.S. military equipment sales to Syria. (This ban was reaffirmed by the Anti-Terrorism and Arms Export Amendments Act of 1989—see below.) Also, 10 U.S.C. 2249a bans obligation of U.S. Defense Department funds for assistance to countries on the terrorism list.

Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1986 (P.L. 99-509). Section 8041(a) of this act (100 Stat. 1962) amended the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 to deny foreign tax credits on income or war profits from countries identified by the Secretary of State as supporting international terrorism. (26 USC 901(j)). The President was given authority to waive this provision under Section 601 of the Trade and Development Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-200, May 18, 2000).

The Anti-Terrorism and Arms Export Control Amendments Act of 1989 (P.L. 101-222). Section 4 amended Section 6(j) of the Export Administration Act to impose a congressional notification and licensing requirement for export of goods or technology, irrespective of dollar value, to countries on the terrorism list, if such exports could contribute to their military capability or enhance their ability to support terrorism.

Section 4 also prescribes conditions for removing a country from the terrorism list: prior notification by the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the chairmen of two specified committees of the Senate. In conjunction with the requisite notification, the President must certify that the country has met several conditions that clearly indicate it is no longer involved in supporting terrorist activity. (In some cases, certification must be provided 45 days in advance of removal of a country from the terrorist list).

The Anti-Economic Discrimination Act of 1994 (Part C, P.L. 103-236, the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, FY1994-1995). Section 564(a) bans the sale or lease of U.S. defense articles and services to any country that questions U.S. firms about their compliance with the Arab boycott of Israel. Section 564(b) contains provisions for a presidential waiver, but no such waiver has been exercised in Syria’s case. Again, this provision is moot in Syria’s case because of other prohibitions already in effect.

The Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-132). This act requires the President to withhold aid to third countries that provide assistance (§325) or lethal military equipment (§326) to countries on the terrorism list, but allows the President to waive this provision on grounds of national interest. A similar provision banning aid to third countries that sell lethal equipment to countries on the terrorism list is contained in Section 549 of the Foreign
Operations Appropriations Act for FY2001 (H.R. 5526, passed by reference in H.R. 4811, which was signed by President Clinton as P.L. 106-429 on November 6, 2000).

Also, Section 321 of P.L. 104-132 makes it a criminal offense for U.S. persons (citizens or resident aliens) to engage in financial transactions with governments of countries on the terrorism list, except as provided in regulations issued by the Department of the Treasury in consultation with the Secretary of State. In the case of Syria, the implementing regulation prohibits such transactions “with respect to which the United States person knows or has reasonable cause to believe that the financial transaction poses a risk of furthering terrorist acts in the United States.” (31 CFR 596, published in the Federal Register August 23, 1996, p. 43462.) In the fall of 1996, the then chairman of the House International Relations Committee reportedly protested to then President Clinton about the Treasury Department’s implementing regulation, which he described as a “special loophole” for Syria.

In addition to the general sanctions listed above, specific provisions in foreign assistance appropriations legislation enacted since 1981 have barred Syria by name from receiving U.S. aid. The most recent ban appears in Section 7007 of P.L. 112-74, Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2012, which states that “None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available pursuant to titles III through VI of this Act shall be obligated or expended to finance directly any assistance or reparations for the governments of Cuba, North Korea, Iran, or Syria: Provided, That for purposes of this section, the prohibition on obligations or expenditures shall include direct loans, credits, insurance and guarantees of the Export-Import Bank or its agents.”

Section 307 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, amended by Section 431 of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act for FY1994-1995 (P.L. 103-236, April 30, 1994), requires the United States to withhold a proportionate share of contributions to international organizations for programs that benefit eight specified countries or entities, including Syria.

The Iran Nonproliferation Act of 2000, P.L. 106-178, was amended by P.L. 109-112 to make its provisions applicable to Syria as well as Iran. The amended act, known as the Iran and Syria Nonproliferation Act, requires the President to submit semi-annual reports to designated congressional committees, identifying any persons involved in arms transfers to or from Iran or Syria; also, the act authorizes the President to impose various sanctions against such individuals. On October 13, 2006, President Bush signed P.L. 109-353 which expanded the scope of the original law by adding North Korea to its provisions, thereby renaming the law the Iran, North Korea, and Syria Nonproliferation Act (or INKSNA for short). The list of Syrian entities designated under INKSNA includes Army Supply Bureau (2008), Syrian Navy (2009), Syrian Air Force (2009), and Ministry of Defense (2008). On May 24, 2011, the State Department designated the Industrial Establishment of Defense and Scientific Studies and Research Center (SSRC) under INKSNA.

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