

Syria War News: Inside the Vortex Of Death That Swallows All



By [Brian Frydenborg](#) September 20, 2013

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The previous two articles in this series on the consequences of U.S. inaction in Syria can be found [here](#) and [here](#).



Photo Credit: AP

Having looked at the impact of U.S. inaction on many of Syria's neighbors, it is time to look at the impact U.S. non-intervention will likely have on Syria itself. The [war in Syria has already](#) gotten [extremely ugly](#) and [brutal on all sides](#). Should these trends continue unabated, the horror of Syria will be magnified exponentially and become a vortex that sucks in the whole region. On the one level, dynamics inside Syria will almost certainly continue to worsen, and export misery and chaos across Syria's borders. And on another level, negative forces from destabilized neighbors will keep emanating into Syria as well, further destabilizing Syria, and then these two levels of forces will reinforce each other, threatening to drag large parts of the region into an abyss of internecine and sectarian conflict.

As [I've discussed before](#), almost 30% of Syria's population of [22.4 million](#) are refugees ([2.1 million, including over 70,000 more since I began writing this series](#)) or internally displaced persons ([4.5 million](#)), with both groups increasing at exponentially higher rates. That means out of the people remaining within Syria, well over 1 out of 5 have had to flee their homes. Both numbers threaten to continue growing dramatically and rapidly as the fighting between Syria's regime, [aided by Hezbollah](#), and [various rebel groups](#) (and sometimes [between different rebel groups](#)) intensifies. In even just a year from now, those numbers could increase by millions. Chemical weapons ("[almost certainly](#)" used by Assad's regime, now say the [UN](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#)) may be used more gruesomely and kill many thousands more, and could even fall into the hands of terrorists or extremists and make their way across the Syrian border to who knows where.

Ethnic cleansing, massacres, and terrorism will all continue to increase. Some of the [same processes that saw a radicalization among many of Iraq's combatants](#) over the last decade are [now occurring in Syria](#). As

groups feel more and more threatened, they will take increasingly extreme measures for both their defense and to enact revenge. This will in turn just feed more violence, create more internally displaced persons and refugees, and will very likely lead to radicalization within refugee camps across the border. As previously discussed, combatants are already using bases in Lebanon and Iraq to carry out attacks inside Syria, and this has started to become a two-way street in [these two countries](#). In addition, clashes are already happening along the [Jordanian](#) and [Turkish](#) borders, a trend that will likely increase as [troop buildups — including American troops and patriot missile batteries on Jordan's border with Syria — take place](#). All this just increases the chances of the war spilling into all these countries.

The calculus that tells you what this balance will produce is simple: [Russia keeps supplying Assad with weapons](#) and diplomatic support, while Al-Qaeda affiliates and other [Islamist extremists from all over the Muslim world support their like-minded brothers in Syria](#), with both supplies and fresh recruits. Who is helping the moderates — moderates who have seen all this support flowing towards their enemies and rivals, moderates who are losing heart, are being left to twist in the wind, and have [repeatedly begged](#) the U.S. for [military aid](#)? The truth is, they are getting very little help, [and their supplies have been inconsistent](#). The Al-Qaeda affiliates and [other Islamic extremists](#), meanwhile, [are on the rise, and at the expense of the moderates](#), whom some extremists refer to as “[tourists](#).” Should these trends continue, the moderates, weaker, poorly supplied, and disorganized, will almost inevitably [be eclipsed in this conflict to the point of near irrelevancy](#).

The picture painted here is fairly clear: much more killing and destabilization inside Syria with more internally displaced persons and refugees, the latter of whom will make life much worse for Syria's

neighbors, and both of whom will present a humanitarian catastrophe. The external factors outlined in previous pieces will only reinforce what is happening in Syria, which will only export more chaos in turn. Increasing radicalization and brutality will drive more non-extremists into the extremists' camps, while foreign supplies and benefactors will continue to tip the scale away from the moderates, all the while Russia keeps propping up Assad. Syria, then, could resemble [Afghanistan in the 1980s](#), which saw a jihadist insurgency against another Russian-backed government (and [Putin wants to warn the U.S. about history?](#)). Eventually, it really will be a conflict that is mainly between Al-Qaeda affiliates with other extremists, and the Syrian regime with Hezbollah, a truly no-win situation for the U.S. and its allies in the region.

Bottom line? The Syrian vortex could realistically lead to all of this — not in years, but within a year. How would the U.S. stay out then?

[Read the next article in this series, on what a U.S. strike in Syria could accomplish, here.](#)