

Breaking News Syria: Why Jordan, Israel, and Turkey Want the U.S. All In



By [Brian Frydenborg](#) September 19, 2013

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The first article in this series can be found [here](#).

[My last piece](#) looked at how the war in Syria, left to its current trends, would exacerbate already terribly destabilizing trends in [Lebanon](#) and [Iraq](#). Other neighbors of Syria might not have it as bad, but for Jordan, Turkey, Egypt, and Israel, Syria's crisis has more than enough trouble to go around.

Jordan:

Jordan, a country of just over 6.18 million people and a key U.S. ally in the region, is hosting [over 519,000 Syrian refugees](#) and is very [worried about the conflict spilling into its borders](#). Unlike Lebanon, which had multiple major reasons for descending into civil war, Jordan [fell into a sort of civil war in 1970-1971](#) primarily because of Palestinian militant/terrorist action originating from refugee camps. The fighting ended when most Palestinian militants were driven from Jordan into southern Lebanon, and we know how well that went. Jordan has also been suffering from a stagnating economy and a lack of progress on reform, [and has its own protests as part of the Arab Spring](#), just not as violent or angry as protests

elsewhere. The massive influx of Syrian refugees threatens to drag economic conditions down dramatically and to increase unrest and instability. Were this small state to sink under the weight of millions of refugees and a collapsing economy, it could face violence and even revolution. Already, [one Syrian refugee camp in Zaatari, hosting 130,000 Syrians, is the fourth largest “city” in Jordan](#), and water and food supplies all over Jordan are strained, as are schools and health facilities.



Photo Credit: *MANDEL NGAN/AFP/Getty Images*

Likely result of U.S. inaction: A dramatic increase in the number of refugees, severe strain on Jordanian state/society (up to and including a revolution), and Syrian war could easily spread to Jordan, in particular if refugee camps become staging areas for cross-border attacks.

Turkey:

[Turkey is supporting Syrian rebels](#) and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been one of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's most vocal critics, [calling for his overthrow through a military intervention](#). [Turkey also currently hosts over 463,000 refugees from Syria](#), and though it is a much larger country with far more resources than, say, Lebanon or Jordan, it is still a burden. [Turkey had its series of massive and violent Arab-Spring-like-demonstrations](#) back in June, [partially because of anger over the effects of Erdogan's Syria policies](#), though the main issue was [Turkey's old secular-vs.-Islamist battle that is at the heart of modern Turkish politics](#). Still, [unrest would only increase if much larger numbers of refugees from Syria entered Turkey](#). In addition, [there have been repeated clashes on the Turkish/Syrian border](#), including Turkey [shooting down a Syrian helicopter](#) on Monday, and this trend would only get worse if the war in Syria worsened, increasing the chances that Turkey, a NATO member, could get sucked into the war.

Likely result of U.S. inaction: Increasing numbers of refugees negatively affect Turkey's stability and economy, and likelihood of Turkey being sucked into war increases, posing serious issues to fellow NATO states, including U.S., which are treaty-bound to back Turkey.

Egypt:

Egypt has had its fair share of recent catastrophes, from [massive protests by former President Mohamed Morsi's opponents](#), to [the Egyptian army's overthrow of Morsi](#), to [the massive counter-demonstrations of Morsi's supporters](#) and [the army's exceedingly violent crackdown on them](#), to [the subsequent slide towards further authoritarianism](#), and to [increasing violence and sectarianism all over Egypt](#), from [Sinai](#) to the [south](#). Into this situation, [over 117,000 Syrian refugees have fled to Egypt](#), and they have

recently [been treated with much hostility by Egyptians](#) since Morsi's ouster and blamed with destabilizing the country.

Likely results of U.S. inaction: While Egypt's problems are not centered around Syrian refugees, an already volatile and unstable situation in Egypt only becomes worse with a massive increase in refugees. Refugees could even become targets of violence, a process that's only just beginning.

Israel:

On one hand, Israel does not have much to worry about. Israel has basically kicked Syria's ass in every war they have fought with each other, and after the [1967 Six-Day War](#), [Israel eventually annexed Syrian territory](#), and has [repeatedly attacked Syrian forces](#) and [targets in Syria](#), with little to no response from the house of Assad. Israel [even twice flew military jets directly over Assad's own palace at low altitude](#), the sonic boom blowing out the palace's windows, and Assad just took it. On the other, if attacks spill over into Israel, well, Israel is famous for its disproportionate military responses, and it is difficult to tell how different groups operating in and near Syria might react were Israel to be drawn into the fighting.

Likely results of U.S. inaction: Israel is likely to be fine in short term, but Israeli anxiety will increase. If things get dramatically worse, it will be tough for Israel, already engaging in [limited strikes in Syria](#) and [Lebanon](#), to stay out.

[Read the next article in the series, on the internal situation within Syria, here.](#)