

Terrorism Monitor

In-depth analysis of the War on Terror

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CAN AND WILL THE SADC HELP CONTAIN VIOLENCE IN MOZAMBIQUE

Brian Perkins

The insurgency in Mozambique's northern Cabo Delgado province has continued to escalate over the past several months, prompting the South African Development Community (SADC)—a regional inter-governmental organization—to convene an emergency meeting of the Organ Troika on Politics, Defense and Security (consisting of Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana) plus Mozambique in Harare, Zimbabwe on May 19 ([SADC](#), May 19). The meeting was the first regionally organized gathering and collective acknowledgement of the increasingly dire situation in Mozambique. However, no concrete plans resulted from the meeting, and instead only underscored internal challenges within the SADC and the trouble emanating from the principle of subsidiarity that governs relations between the African Union (AU) and Regional Economic Communities (REC), such as SADC. Further, its timing underscored the mistakes already made by the Mozambican government.

Much of the blame for the exceptionally slow external response to the insurgency in Mozambique, which has

resulted in an estimated death toll of over 1,000 people, lies squarely on the Mozambican government for mischaracterizing and underestimating the culprits and downplaying the levels of violence. The rebranding of the local Ansar al-Sunna as part of Islamic State Central Africa Province (IS-CAP) as well as the increased tempo and scale of attacks has now made the situation impossible to ignore. Neighboring countries, however, were also slow to acknowledge the severity, with the AU acknowledging the situation and confirming its willingness to help in February, despite being hamstrung by the principle of subsidiarity—in which the AU only plays a secondary role after RECs attempt but are unable to correct an issue—and the fact the SADC had yet to make any attempt to address the matter ([ISS Africa](#), February 13).

Tanzania is not a current member of the Organ Troika, but as the country most affected by the violence in Mozambique and with Tanzanian President John Magufuli being the current SADC chairperson, it is curious that he did not take part in the meeting. Tanzania has so far been reticent to provide much support beyond one-off security operations and tightening its border security, despite being an origin and transit point of militants fighting in Mozambique. Surprisingly, it is not Tanzania,

the country closest to the center of the violence, that is seemingly most concerned about its spread. Instead, it is South Africa—current chair of the AU—that has been among the most open in its willingness to help, despite being the furthest from the center of the violence out of all the countries that border Mozambique ([Africa Report](#), June 23). In addition to South Africa, Angola has also reportedly offered to provide troops and assistance.

For regional support to provide any real value, Mozambique would first need to begin not only addressing the underlying root causes of the insurgency, but also the fundamental deficiencies within its security apparatus. A key problem thus far has been that before engaging its own citizens in the affected regions or engaging neighboring states for meaningful support, the government brought in Private Military Companies (PMCs) from Russia and, more recently, South Africa. The PMC approach was taken quickly instead of utilizing any meaningful localized response that could have combined community engagement, economic development projects, and localized security operations. Furthermore, military reforms or tightened control have likewise not been prioritized. As mistrust and corruption within the Mozambican military has grown increasingly apparent, the specialized Rapid Intervention Unit of the Mozambican police has become one of the primary units conducting operations against the militants, causing a serious rift between the two sides ([Bulawayo 24](#), June 26).

Despite vague offers of assistance from SADC members, it is unclear if any concrete plans will materialize, or if the SADC members are even currently in a place to assist given many of their poor economic conditions, as well as their respective militaries' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, the most meaningful external response would come from the Tanzanian government. Similarly, without meaningful efforts by the Mozambican government to address the region's dire social and economic woes or reform its security apparatus, external intervention will likely do little more than exacerbate the problem.

Brian Perkins is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor

EXPANDED COORDINATION NEEDED DESPITE NEW SAHEL COALITION

Brian Perkins

As jihadist groups have wreaked havoc across the Sahel and found safe havens in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso over the past several years, coastal West African nations repeatedly raised the alarm that the violence was knocking on the region's doorsteps. A stark reminder of this threat came again on June 11, when unidentified jihadists attacked a frontier post on Ivory Coast's border with Burkina Faso, killing at least 10 Ivorian soldiers. The attack was the first by a jihadist group since al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) claimed responsibility for the 2016 attack on the Grand Bassam Hotel that killed at least 19 people. The assault on the frontier post comes amid French efforts to launch a new coalition against Sahel-based militants, but preventing the spread of violence into coastal West African states will largely fall outside the French coalition's direct purview.

On June 12, France launched a new coalition of West African and European allies that aims to bring the 5,000 French troops in the region and those from the G5 Sahel states of Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, and Mauritania under a single command ([RFI](#), June 15). The coalition will also see support from Canada, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. The focus of the coalition's efforts will be on the tri-border region of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, where Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS)—now formally part of the Islamic State's West African Province (ISWAP)—are particularly active. While the new coalition will likely help disrupt militancy in the tri-border region, it could also displace militants, pushing them deeper into Burkina Faso and the trickle-down effects of successful operations in the tri-border area will be slow to ease the concerns of states along West Africa's coast.

While not part of the coalition, the Ivory Coast has taken on a more active role in the fight against Sahel-based jihadist groups as their activities have increasingly spread beyond the tri-border region into southwestern Burkina Faso. The outpost attack came just a month after Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso launched their first joint military operation, named Operation Comoe.

Operation Comoe, named for the river that runs along the border, was prompted by an increase in jihadist activity in southwestern Burkina Faso over the past year

and has taken place between Ferkéssédougou, Ivory Coast and Banfora, Burkina Faso. The operation has resulted in the death of at least eight militants and the arrest of 38 others, as well as the dismantling of a “jihadist base” in Alidouougou, Burkina Faso ([Al Jazeera](#), June 11). Despite some successes, the operation also further highlighted ongoing mistrust and a lack of coordination among the two countries as an Ivorian commander reportedly leaked details of a joint operation to civilians, compromising the mission ([Jeune Africa](#), May 22). Prior to the launch of Operation Comoe, Ivorian authorities expressed frustration in January over the lack of coordination after Burkinabe forces shelled jihadist positions along the border in January without informing their Ivorian counterparts ([LSi Africa](#), January 5).

While the new French coalition raises some hope of progress against jihadists in the Sahel, it will likely do little to assuage the fears of coastal West African states, particularly Ivory Coast. The attack on the Ivorian military post underscored the threat and while Operation Comoe is a positive step, it highlights the need to strengthen both regional and international cooperation in the coastal region. France and the Sahel coalition should work to facilitate closer coordination with neighboring states that fall outside of the coalition to address the threats outside of the coalition’s core area of operations.

Brian Perkins is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor

An Impending Assault on Idlib

Ben Abboudi

While the world has been distracted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation in Syria’s northwestern Idlib province remains volatile. The region, which has seen a period of relative calm, is on the brink of another major government offensive.

Turkey has long sought the fall of the Assad regime and has conducted numerous incursions into northern Syria. In February of this year, the deaths of 34 Turkish soldiers resulted in multiple retaliatory bombings of Syrian military positions, labeled ‘Operation Spring Shield.’ Shortly after this, Turkey and Turkish-backed forces repelled Russian and Syrian attempts to capture territory and a ceasefire was declared between the two countries in March.

The ceasefire held from March to May, owing largely to Russian and Turkish compliance in carrying out patrols south of the M4 highway—a key ceasefire requirement. However, by the start of June, the precarious peace began to falter. Russian airstrikes in the designated de-escalation zone reportedly killed up to three civilians on June 8, and Iranian paramilitary groups have reportedly begun increasing fighter numbers near Turkish observation posts ([Anadolu Agency](#), June 8; [Al Jazeera](#), June 14). In addition to this, signs have emerged that the Turkish government is preparing to strike Idlib in the coming weeks. Turkish-backed groups in the region have been told to expect an assault, and the Turkish authorities have been dropping leaflets onto Idlib, calling for civilians to support its military goals ([Middle East Monitor](#), April 28).

Russian and Turkish Interests at Play

While both Turkey and Russia have worked to prevent the Assad regime from recapturing Idlib and thereby seize control of the majority of Syria, both countries have their own vested interest in controlling the northwestern province.

Turkey wants an area under its control on its southern border to counter any Kurdish insurgency. It has been significantly bolstering its military capabilities, deploying up to 10,000 troops and over 7,000 military vehicles in

recent months ([Al Monitor](#), June 18). It has also begun distributing the Turkish lira to local communities and setting up governmental offices within the region, suggesting Ankara intends on maintaining a long-term presence in the region ([Al Monitor](#), June 18).

At the same time, Russia has been shoring up the Assad government with modern military jets and equipment and has insisted that all Turkish-controlled areas of northern Syria be transferred back to the Assad regime. It has an interest in securing the M4 highway, which would help to restart the Syrian economy, currently on the verge of collapse. While Turkey has been encouraged by reports in Russian state media that Moscow is starting to tire of Assad, Putin has invested heavily in the dictator's future and will support the Syrian regime in its attempt to recapture Idlib.

Despite the ceasefire agreement in March seemingly indicating rapprochement, the two sides are undeniably rivals within Syria. Just this week, talks were canceled between the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu and his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, suggesting a renewed disagreement over the status of the area ([Al Jazeera](#), June 14).

Presence of Militant Groups

The continued presence of Islamist groups in Idlib is yet another reason for a renewed government offensive in the region. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), an al-Qaeda offshoot, still retains a large presence in the enclave and is considered a terrorist organization by the international community. The group has been pivotal in defending a government takeover of the area and was highly important in recapturing key locations in Idlib during previous government offensives. Turkey pledged to remove HTS and other jihadist groups from the area in recent talks with Russia, but this has failed to materialize. This benefits the government and Russia, as HTS' presence allows them to justify their assaults as apparent liberation of the region from terrorist control. Despite imposing austere Islamic law over areas it controls, HTS has attempted to rebrand itself as a more mainstream 'anti-Assad' Islamist organization, in order to shore up support among the local population.

Signs have emerged, however, that HTS is weakened and may not be able to sustain a defense of Idlib. The group is split between hard-line elements that oppose the ceasefire with Russia and Turkish influence in the region and leadership that has taken a more pragmatic

view in order to survive. These splits may somewhat explain why, in recent days, several al-Qaeda-linked groups, including HTS, announced a joint military operations room with the intention of countering the Syrian government ([Middle East Eye](#), June 23). While it is not uncommon for rebel and jihadist groups to form often short-lived alliances, it suggests that these groups are anticipating hostilities to escalate in the near future, and displays intentions to counter an incoming attack by Assad's forces.

Conclusion

While Assad has been successful in retaking large swathes of the country lost to opposition and jihadist groups such as Islamic State (IS), a renewed assault on Idlib is likely to prove his toughest challenge yet. His previous attempt to take the city was met with fierce resistance by Islamist rebel groups such as HTS, the National Liberation Front (NLF), and Jaish al-Izzah. Despite Russian assistance facilitating superior airpower, even the most elite units of the Syrian Army struggled to hold on to territory within Idlib. Recapturing the territory is likely to prove extremely difficult for Assad. Finally, even if the Syrian government were to assert control over large swathes of the region, a myriad of Turkish-backed forces and jihadist groups extremely hostile to Assad and his army would likely mount insurgency campaigns, leaving Idlib unstable under governmental control.

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Wagner Group in Libya: Weapon of War or Geopolitical Tool?

Sergey Sukhankin

Introduction

On June 9, Russian Special Presidential Envoy for the Middle East and Africa Mikhail Bogdanov dismissed the presence of Russian mercenaries in Libya and their military support of the Libyan National Army (LNA). The diplomat stated that, "Information spread by some foreign sources, including the U.S. State Department, that the Wagner Group's members are present in Libya and participate in combat actions on the side of the Libyan National Army of Khalifa Haftar, largely relies on fabricated data and is aimed at discrediting Russia's policy on Libya" ([Tass](#), June 9). This statement sharply contrasts with a myriad of reputable sources, including, among others, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), which claimed that no less than 2,000 Russian mercenaries are fighting on the side of the LNA ([Libyan Express](#), June 16). While the presence of the Wagner Group in Libya is undeniable, one important transformation has to be noted. Between 2018-2020, the group's mission seems to have shifted from a "weapon of war" to a "tool of geopolitics".

Wagner on the Retreat

Supported by Turkey, the counter-offensive launched by the Government of the National Accord (GNA) resulted in a series of military defeats for the LNA forces, causing the Wagner Group to retreat from the frontline eastward ([Middle East Eye](#), June 6). However, this retreat had started much earlier and by no means is a signal of Russia's ultimate withdrawal from Libya. On January 12, the Commander of the Special Military Operations Room, Support Force – Tripoli (SFT), Nasser Ammar, claimed that Russian mercenaries started to withdraw toward al-Jufra airbase. At the time, he noted, more than 500 Russian mercenaries (and over 1,000 Janjaweed militants) were located in/near the Salah Al-Deen, Yarmouk, Khallatat, and Abu Salim frontlines ([Libya Observer](#), January 12). By the end of May, the exodus of Wagner fighters was obvious with reportedly, "1,500 to 1,600 mercenaries" fleeing from the front lines to Bani Walid

and further eastward ([Al Jazeera](#), May 25; [Daily Sabah](#), May 27).

The roots of this withdrawal stem from three issues. First, Wagner and the LNA are militarily inferior due to the emergence of Turkish advanced weaponry—primarily unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs) ([T-intell.com](#), May 22). Second, Russians face rising issues with Haftar, who has reportedly accused Russians of sending, "not so experienced [fighters] from Syria, Belarus and Serbia" and failing to fulfill his contractual obligations of paying approximately \$150 million to the Wagner Group ([Libya Observer](#), May 14). Third, Russia is using mercenary forces as leverage to make Haftar—who has unnerved Moscow on several occasions—more docile ([YouTube](#), June 16).

The New Face of the Wagner Group?

Despite the retreat from the frontline, no information on the Wagner Group pulling out of the country, or wider Russian withdrawal, has emerged. On the contrary, Russia has increased its involvement in Libya in two primary ways.

First, Russia has increased its recruitment mechanisms with Russian non-state actors—including representatives of Wagner—becoming closely involved in recruiting Syrian fighters that are transported to Libya to fight on the side of the LNA ([Libya Observer](#), January 6).

According to Turkish sources, Russia has been involved in recruiting militants from Quneitra governorate, Syria. One such group accounts for 300-400 fighters who were reportedly brought to Libya between April and early May ([Inosmi.ru](#), April 15). Other sources suggest that the "trilateral cooperation" (Russia-Syria-LNA) on recruiting and transporting mercenaries to Libya is accomplished via the Eastern Libyan Embassy in Damascus that reopened in March 2020 ([Sana.sy](#), March 3). Syrian sources have argued that the main "recruiting centers" are operating in Homs, Damascus, Khama, Daraa, and As-Suwayda. In total, no less than 1,500 militants have been recruited through these centers with the help of the Wagner Group and its representatives. Many of them are "Well trained servicemen and professionals from special forces"—although this information is questioned by other sources ([Inosmi.ru](#), April 28).

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights claimed that "More than 900 Syrians were recruited by Russia to fight in Libya in May [alone], with fighters being trained in

Homs before going to Libya” ([Al Araby](#), June 7). Interestingly, some sources have gone even further, arguing that the recruitment process in Syria is headed not merely by non-state actors, but Russian officials. Specifically mentioned is Colonel Alexander “the Godfather” Zorin, who in 2016 served as the Russian defense ministry’s envoy to the Geneva-based task force on cessation of hostilities in Syria. Zorin acquired fame in Syria by taking part in some “peace-building” missions in Ghouta, Daraa, and Quneitra ([Ria.ru](#), June 14, 2017). An unnamed Russian source has claimed that Zorin arrived in southern Syria in April on a recruiting mission, where he held talks with a number of militant factions, some of whom declared a willingness to fight in Libya ([Foreign Policy](#), May 5).

Second, Russia is expanding its covert military-technical cooperation with the LNA by sending (via Syria) at least 14 MiG-29s and several Su-24s, whose images were captured by USAFRICOM ([Africom.mil](#), June 18). This transfer has been challenged by Russian sources that dispute the number of fighter jets in May ([Nvo.ng.ru](#), June 5). For now, however, there is no record proving these fighter jets have performed any military missions.

Conclusion

By expanding its control to the realm of recruitment and intensifying military-technical cooperation, Russia has profoundly increased its role in the LNA’s combat capability. This, along with manipulations by Wagner mercenaries (arguably, the most capable part of the LNA forces), allows Moscow to exert pressure on the LNA leadership by becoming the *de facto* power behind the LNA forces. As argued by Kirill Semenov, “[I]n case of necessity, military contractors will likely be ordered to withdraw from the front to make him [Haftar] more cooperative” ([Al-Monitor](#), May13). Indeed, it is legitimate to say that the Wagner Group has become a tool, allowing “Moscow to have a say in the Libyan conflict” ([Libya Observer](#), January 6).

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Could Russia Lose the Syrian Arab Army to Iran or General Maher al-Assad?

Can Kasapoglu

The security apparatus remains the key pillar of political power in the contemporary Arab state system. Whatever the post-war outlook of Syria will look like, its fabric will not change overnight. In one way or another, the Syrian military and intelligence community will remain the kingmaker in the aftermath of the war.

Russia will have to compete with Iran, as well as the ruling clan’s thuggish ‘shogun,’ General Maher al-Assad, to shape the Syrian Arab Armed Forces’ future, and thus, the country’s future.

Syria’s Military Bipolarity

The Syrian Arab Army (SAA), Hafez al-Assad’s carefully designed sectarian war machine, has been systematically exposed to two main military vectors over the last decade. First, there is the Iranian clout. While the Western strategic community focuses on Salafi-jihadist extremism in Syria, another type of jihadism has arisen. Brokered by the Iranian Quds Forces, Shia jihadism mounting in the Levant, attracting fighters from a broad landscape ranging from Lebanese Hezbollah and Iraqi militiamen to the Fatimiyoun and Zeinebioun brigades from Afghanistan and Pakistan ([Al Arabiya](#), September 20, 2018). [1] The impact of Shia jihadism, coupled with the Iranian influence over Syria’s homegrown militias, turned the Baath regime’s paramilitary network, the National Defense Forces (NDF), into a shadow army. The NDF outweighs the SAA in available manpower and average wages. [2]

Second, there is the Russian school, which has dominated Syria for decades. After all, during the Cold War, out of the Egyptian, Iraqi, and Syrian militaries, it was the SAA which most closely resembled the Soviet doctrines and operational art. [3]

Nevertheless, some telltale indicators highlight the limits of the Kremlin’s control over today’s Syrian military. The SAA suffers from fragmentation and shortcomings in combat capabilities. The Russians, in a micro-managing fashion, invested in their favorite Syrian units, helping them digest advanced concepts of operations. Back in

August 2017, for example, paratroopers from General Suheil al-Hassan's then so-called Tiger Forces—at present the 25th Division—conducted an airborne operation about 120 kilometers west of Deir ez-Zor. The assault was planned by Russian military advisors and supported by Russian Ka-52 gunships ([TASS](#), August 14, 2017). Although one can spot a number of advanced operational glimpses, like the Tiger Forces' airborne blitz, Russia fell short of extending such capabilities to the entire Syrian Armed Forces. For example, unlike the Serbians in the 1990s, the Syrian air defense units could not grasp shoot-and-scoop concepts—the tactic of firing artillery at a target and immediately moving to avoid counter-battery fire—and radar management for operating mobile Pantsir systems effectively. This shortcoming inevitably led to a large number of losses against Israeli and Turkish drone attacks ([Al Masdar News](#), January 30; [Yeni Şafak](#), March 4).

Besides, the militia formations established by the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Iranian Quds' Forces act like an almost independent entity ([Al-Monitor](#), April 22). To address the paramilitaries problem, some Russian experts proposed reviving the corps of the Syrian Arab Army and turning them into 'territorial commands' resembling military districts of the Russian principal to bring all fighters under unitary oversight ([Russian International Affairs Council](#), March 13, 2018). Thus far, Moscow has not accomplished this aspirant change.

Lastly, absence of a 'Syrian security belt' around the Hmeimim base remains the most telling evidence showcasing the failure of Russian forces in building control over the whole Syrian defense apparatus. The base is surrounded by an exclusion zone around its perimeters supported with Russian check-points. Some writings have even claimed that pro-regime militias were attempting false flag attacks on the Russian contingent ([Al-Monitor](#), April 22).

Russia Versus Maher al-Assad: Meet the Syrian 4th Armored Division

Maher al-Assad's power within the SAA remains yet another setback that disrupts the Kremlin's security sector reform plans. Maher, Bashar's younger brother, commands the praetorian 4th Armored Division, a special unit predominantly manned by the Alawite sect from which the Assad clan hails. According to Russian assessments, Maher looms large as the only one in the Baath regime's *nomenklatura* who can impose his views on Bashar. Back in 2016, sensationally, speculation emerged claiming that General Maher al-Assad was

preparing for a Tehran-backed coup in Damascus. The referred Russian writings openly portray him as "one of the key conduits of the Iranian interests in the Syrian leadership" ([Russian International Affairs Council](#), February 12, 2018).

At the time of writing, Maher al-Assad's confrontations with the Russians surfaced tangibly in the lucrative 'check-point business.' According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Russia ordered all armed groups affiliated with the 4th Armored Division to withdraw from the checkpoints across Syria. Maher failed to comply with these demands and ordered his men to keep the checkpoints as usual ([SOHR](#), June 13).

The 4th Armored Division and Maher al-Assad, both recently sanctioned under the recent Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, oversees a substantial portion of Syria's war economy through smuggling networks, militias, checkpoints, and convoy security, as well as scrap trade through shady 'businessman' like Muhammed Hamsho ([U.S. Department of State](#), June 17). The 4th Armored Division's security bureau, headed by General Ghassan Bilal, controls affiliated political, business, and paramilitary circles. Although the unit has its garrison headquarters in the capital Damascus, the security bureau established branches in broader Syria, including the ones overseeing the Tartus and Latakia ports, as well as major population centers like Aleppo, Masyaf, and Homs. Ghassan Bilal has been comrade-in-arms with Maher al-Assad since their days in the military academy together back in the late 1980s. They were both trained by Hafez al-Assad's favorite and eldest son, and once heir, Basel al-Assad, who passed away in 1994. While the Russians tried to discharge General Bilal Ghassan in 2019, Maher prevented it ([Aldassouky](#), January 24).

Overall, the 4th Armored Division is more than a maneuver unit. Based on the Baath regime's political-military characteristics, it is the organized manifestation of Maher al-Assad's dominance across the country through military might. Moscow's plans of building a centralized, regular doctrinal order of battle for the SAA and organizing a 'normal' armed force with no organic ties to tycoons and black-market businesses would be tantamount to curbing Maher's privileged power position, something that he cannot settle for.

What Next?

Russia can secure its strategic interests in Syria only through ensuring Damascus' monopoly of power in a Weberian sense. In the meantime, Iran's favorable end-

state revolves around the 'Lebanization' of the Syrian security apparatus. In this respect, the Quds Force calculates that the National Defense Forces will never be formally integrated into the SAA. Institutionalization of the already in-place fragmentation would lead to a permanent military dichotomy (see [Terrorism Monitor](#), March 24, 2017). In brief, it is either Moscow or Tehran who will prevail in the Syrian bonanza after the war.

While Maher al-Assad is, for certain, not ideologically aligned with Iran's theological dictatorship, he can definitely find more space for himself in Tehran's 'Lebanized' Syria, rather than Moscow's state capacity-building efforts to rejuvenate its Cold War client.

From now on, one can expect two major trajectories and a wildcard scenario to follow. First, during the reconstruction period, the West, Israel, Turkey, and the Saudi and Emirati bloc could side with Russia against Iranian dominance since the latter would bring a potential catastrophe to the Middle East, while the former may be tantamount to the lesser evil. Alternatively, the Iranian model could prevail amid the already avalanching chaos and power vacuum in the war-torn country. In such a scenario, Shia jihadism will establish its aggressive political order gradually. Finally, in the wildcard case, we could witness the brothers' quarrel reemerge, resembling Rifaat al-Assad's coup attempt against his brother Hafez in 1984. The wildcard scenario would depend on to what extent Maher would feel cornered by the Russians or by Bashar himself, and to what extent the Russians would tolerate him.

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Notes

[1] See The Shiite Jihad in Syria and Its Regional Effects <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-shiite-jihad-in-syria-and-its-regional-effects>

[2] See Syria's Transactional State: How the Conflict Changed the Syrian State's Exercise of Power <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/>

[research/2018-10-10-syrias-transactional-state-khatib-sinjab.pdf](#)

[3] See Eisenstadt, Michael & Pollack, Kenneth. (2001). *Armies of Snow and Armies of Sand: The Impact of Soviet Military Doctrine on Arab militaries* 1. *The Middle East Journal*.