

When Terrorists and Target Governments Cooperate: the Case of Syria

by Michael Becker

Abstract

In the course of the Syrian Civil War, the Syrian government has had an unusual relationship with the numerous groups seeking to overthrow it; at times, the government of Bashar al-Assad has deliberately avoided engaging the more radical elements of the opposition, including the al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State, and has also purchased oil from them, effectively bankrolling some of ISIS' operations. This case thus represents an unusual—but not totally unique—instance of indirect cooperation between a militant group and the government being targeted by it. Taking the Syrian case as a point of departure, the Research Note investigates the circumstances under which target governments and militant groups each benefit from having the other as a foil. The findings of the Syrian case indicate that such tacit cooperation is more likely in circumstances where opposition forces are ideologically fragmented, where intervention by external states is likely, and where governments are faced with existential threats.

Keywords: Syria; al Nusra; ISIS

Introduction

In the course of the past year, it was revealed that the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, embroiled in a brutal civil war in Syria, has made use of a rather unorthodox strategy in its efforts to crush the opposition. Not only have government forces at times spared the Islamic State (hereafter IS) and the Al-Nusra Front (hereafter ANF)—two of the most radical elements of the opposition—from attack,[1] but the Assad regime has also knowingly supported them by purchasing oil and gas from territory controlled by these rebels and by releasing prisoners associated with the militant groups.[2] The case of Syria thus represents a most unusual situation: a government, under attack from a variety of rebel militant groups, chooses not to strike back against the most radical of the militants, and indeed effectively bankrolls their operations at least in part, while focusing its military operations mainly on the more moderate rebels, such as the Free Syrian Army.[3]

Yet while this case has received a moderate degree of attention from various media outlets, scholars have not yet considered in a systematic manner the strategic logic of the Assad government's decision, nor whether or not it may have applications in other cases. This Research Note aims to suggest new directions for investigations into insurgent-government relations. It proceeds in the following manner. First, the specifics of the situation in Syria are discussed, including the nature of the unusual, tacit cooperation between the Assad government and the more radical of the Sunni insurgents, as well as the conditions that led to a resumption of hostilities between them. Second, the costs and benefits of, respectively, cooperation and confrontation are considered, leading to a two-level analysis of the likely motivations behind each actor's decision to cooperate, at least indirectly, with the other. Third, a framework is proposed, building from the Syrian case, that explains when cooperation between target governments and insurgents is possible. Finally, this Research Note offers suggestions for future research.

The Nature of Regime-Insurgent Cooperation in Syria

The Syrian civil war, which began in 2011, has pitted regime forces and their backers against a diverse collection of insurgents. The conflict first erupted in the context of the “Arab Spring” uprisings, and has taken on the complexion of a proxy war, making for strange allies.[4] On the regime side, Assad’s government has received material and human support from Russia, Iran and the Lebanon-based militant group Hezbollah. The various insurgent groups have been backed, to different extents and at different times, by the members of the European Union, the United States, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and numerous militant groups, including affiliates of al-Qaida.[5]

This complex interweaving of religion, ethnicity, and geopolitics complicates the seeming Sunni versus Shia nature of the conflict. While it is true that, generally speaking, the regime and many of its allies are Shia-affiliated, and that most of the insurgents are in some way associated with Sunni Islam, the reality of the situation is much more complex. Especially on the side of the insurgents, deep cleavages have formed with respect to both acceptable military means and tactics and the eventual desired political system for Syria.[6] These cleavages have deteriorated relations among many of the rebels to the point that infighting among them is, in some areas, more common than fighting against government forces. This has complicated the strategic landscape for all parties to the conflict, leading to inventive alignments that cut across belligerents’ lines. While subsequent sections of this Research Note delve into the specific cost-benefit calculus underlying inter-belligerent cooperation and confrontation, this section first describes the nature and extent of that cooperation, focusing in particular on the tacit cooperative arrangement that sprung up in the early stages of the Syrian conflict between the Assad government and the Sunni militant groups IS and ANF.

To begin, a caveat is in order. The evidence does not support—and this Research Note does not seek to demonstrate—that Assad has actively sought to promote the interests of certain Sunni militants as a first-order matter when he makes decisions, or that IS and ANF would secretly prefer that Assad win the war. Rather, this article argues that a certain constellation of conditions has temporarily led each party at certain points to aid, actively or passively, the other in pursuit of *its own* best interests.

It is difficult to determine the full extent of cooperation between the Assad regime and IS and ANF: reliable information about the Syrian conflict is difficult to come by, and as the next section argues, both sides have an incentive to hide their cooperation. Yet the Syrian government’s support for extremist Sunni groups likely predates the start of the Syrian Civil War. Evidence from the Sinjar Records, a cache of al-Qaida files obtained by the American military in 2007, indicates that Syria helped to funnel jihadist fighters into Iraq during the mid-2000s.[7] Of course, this is not as surprising as Assad’s support for Sunni militants after the start of the war at home. Before 2011 Assad’s government was not under active assault by Sunni militants. Yet it is worth noting that contacts between Assad’s government and certain jihadist groups are longstanding.

The Assad regime’s support for jihadist groups was equally visible in the early stages of the Syrian conflict. Even as the regime decried “terrorist” elements among the opposition, Assad ordered the release of scores of known Sunni jihadists, many of whom later joined groups such as the al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State.[8] As the next section discusses, it behooves Assad, both domestically and internationally, to portray the opposition as composed of “terrorists,” whether or not the majority of rebel fighters actually shared the extreme ideology espoused by jihadist groups.[9]

Besides these prisoner releases, cooperation between the Assad government and the insurgents who claim to be trying to bring him down has taken two forms. First, Syrian government forces have at times—though by no means without exception—avoided attacking rebels from IS or ANF when they had the opportunity to do so, preferring instead to focus their energies on the more moderate elements of the opposition.[10] One IS fighter stated, “We were confident that the regime would not bomb us.”[11] For their part, IS and

other insurgent groups have for the most part focused their military operations against each other, rather than against the Assad regime's forces.[12] Second, the Syrian government has engaged in energy deals with IS and ANF, purchasing oil and gas from territory the militant groups controlled.[13] It is true that such energy deals are in part a function of the exigencies of war: Syrian rebels need money, the Assad regime needs oil, and neither has many alternative ways of obtaining these resources. Therefore, such energy deals are not necessarily indicative of an active collaboration between the Assad regime and Sunni jihadist groups. Nevertheless, they do reflect the fact that both actors are not opposed to striking deals with each other when it suits their interests, a fact which is at odds with the way each claims to feel about the other.

It is worth noting that several observers have denied the existence of any sort of arrangement, tacit or not, between Assad and jihadist groups. Their main point is that hostilities between the two are ongoing, and brutal.[14] This argument, however, suffers from two flaws. First, the onetime existence of a mutually beneficial arrangement does not preclude either party from eventually turning on the other. In other words, clashes between government forces and IS militants—some of which have been devastating[15]—in no way nullify instances of cooperation. Second, both parties are capable of playing a complicated game that transcends the ideal types of “enemies” and “allies”. As Brian Fishman pointed out, “there is a difference between ‘an explicit partnership [and] an implicit alignment of interests.’”[16] Assad, IS and ANF have a history of cooperating, when possible, against mutual enemies like the more moderate rebels, and each benefits from having the other as a foil for recruitment and fundraising. In other words, the three are capable of cooperating in certain domains without actively conspiring together since, in the end, each seeks to limit the other's military capabilities and geographic sphere of influence.

The temporary and limited nature of the coincidence of interests between the Syrian regime and IS and ANF was illustrated by a reprisal of clashes between them in mid-2014, as IS in particular continued to gain in influence and seized more and more territory. Whereas before, IS focused mainly on battling other rebel groups, consolidating its territorial gains, and instituting its Islamist form of governance in areas it controlled, increasingly the militant group began striking regime targets and territory, including engaging in an especially brutal massacre of hundreds of regime troops in July of 2014.[17] Regime forces have also carried out strikes against IS targets.[18]

Yet notwithstanding recent clashes between jihadists and government forces, the two players have a history of implicit cooperation, if not outright collusion. Moreover, even as conflict between jihadist groups and the Syrian government became more common, the bloodiest, most contested battles remained those between, on the one hand, moderate rebels and more extreme militant groups, and on the other hand, between moderate rebels and the Syrian government. The battle for the town of Kobanê, between Kurdish forces and IS, is emblematic of this tendency. In general, then, while the evidence supporting government-insurgent cooperation is at times patchy and difficult to verify, the totality of the information presented in this section militates toward the existence of a sometime, tacit arrangement between Assad and IS and ANF. The remaining sections of this Research Note are dedicated to explaining the incentives that led to this arrangement, and to examining possible analogous situations wherein a target government cooperates with the militants targeting it.

The Costs and Benefits of Regime-Insurgent Cooperation in Syria: a Two-Level Framework

Benefits to the Syrian Regime

The Assad government reaps several benefits by its support of IS and ANF, which can most easily be elucidated using a two-level framework. On the international level, the more influence and territory amassed

by the Sunni extremist groups, the more credence is lent to Assad's claim that the Syrian opposition, or at least a sizable contingent within it, is composed of "terrorists." If Assad can successfully portray the opposition as terrorists, or can empower the segments of the opposition who actually are terrorists, the less likely it is that the opposition will receive support from the West or even from Sunni regimes that oppose militant Islam, like Saudi Arabia. This assertion is supported by the circumstances under which non-lethal American military aid to the rebels was halted in late 2013—it was out of concern that the supplies, whatever proximate use to which they might be put, would eventually end up in the hands of al-Qaida or another hostile militant group.[19]

This assertion is also supported by the nature of Western and Arab governments' intervention in Syria in late 2014. After the kidnapping and beheading of several Western citizens, and amid growing worldwide concern about the growing capabilities of IS, a coalition of countries began a (largely air-based) military campaign against IS targets in Iraq and Syria. The reactions from the Assad regime were initially somewhat ambivalent. Eventually, however, despite some nominal protestations about violation of its sovereignty, government officials spoke approvingly of the intervening states' operations against "terrorists." [20] Thus the strengthening of IS, as well as its extreme methods, allowed the Assad regime credibly to label the Syrian opposition as terrorists, and therefore to minimize the chances that Western and Arab powers would contribute significantly to the overthrow of the Assad regime. This present situation stands in marked contrast to that of 2012, when President Obama threatened force against the Syrian regime, and at a time when Western leaders were in broad agreement that Assad should cease power. As a result of Assad's successful efforts to marginalize moderate rebels and depict Syrian politics as a zero-sum game with only two major players—his regime, and extreme groups like IS and ANF—his regime is now regarded by many in the West as the lesser evil.

On the domestic level as well, Assad and his government benefit from cooperation with IS and ANF, and more specifically from the latter's strengthened hand vis-à-vis the other insurgent groups. This is so for several reasons. First, the extreme political preferences of ANF and, to an even larger degree, IS are unpopular among many Syrians.[21] They include the institution of political Islam, certain mandatory garments for women, and bans on alcohol. If these planks come to dominate the platform of the insurgency in the minds of many Syrians, it will sap support for the general cause, and make Assad's regime appear moderate by comparison.

Second, to the extent that aid to the more radical Sunni insurgents stimulates infighting among the rebels instead of between them and the Syrian government's forces, Assad benefits. In the more recent years of the Syrian conflict, collaboration between different insurgent groups has been sporadic, but marred by bloody conflict, especially between jihadist groups like IS and the more politically moderate elements, like the Free Syrian Army. In part, this conflict is due to the variance in political preferences of the different insurgent wings; however, perhaps equally important has been the perception that some of the insurgents are in league with the Syrian government.

Costs to the Syrian Regime

Involvement with extremist groups like IS and ANF, though not entirely costless from a reputational standpoint, has not been as risky as it might appear at first glance, making Assad's calculation a shrewd one. The main risk involved in cooperating with hostile Sunni insurgents is that Assad's Syrian constituents and patron states—most notably Iran and Russia—would become aware of his strategy. In the first case, Assad can deny his involvement to his constituents, as he has done, by denouncing such reports as rumors designed

to discredit him.[22] Syrians who do have access to reliable information will likely be members of the government, and will thus benefit from cooperation in a similar way as Assad himself.

On the international level, it is probable that Iran and Russia are aware of Assad's tacit cooperation with jihadist rebels. Yet while leaders of those countries—especially Iran—are not likely to be pleased that Assad, however passively, supported radical Sunni insurgents, there is reason to believe that they may sympathize with the logic underlying the decision. Stated simply, if Iran and Russia sincerely support Assad, they would want him to take the actions that are most likely to lead to victory for his regime. If doing so involves duplicitous cooperation with certain segments of the insurgents, this may be a necessary price to pay. On the other hand, however, it is possible that Russia and Iran do not support Assad for his own sake, but rather because he claims to oppose the kind of Sunni extremism abhorrent to Russia and Iran, or in Iran's case, because he is affiliated with the Shia branch of Islam. Yet even if this were true, both Russia and Iran, as can be stated with confidence, would be vehemently opposed to any Western involvement on the insurgents' behalf. Therefore, the rise of IS and ANF, though repugnant to Iran and Russia in and of itself, may produce some happy consequences from their point of view, since it reduces the chances of any substantial Western backing of the rebels. In the eyes of Russia and Iran, this may justify, to some extent at least, Assad's decision to cooperate with some of the insurgents.

A final, serious risk to the Assad regime is that he empowers IS or ANF to the point where they can not only dominate other elements of the insurgency, but actually depose him from power as well. Assad's likely goal in cooperating with extremist groups is that they gain power *relative to other insurgent groups*, but not to the point where they are capable of overthrowing his government. It is likely, however, that Assad's chances of remaining in power are maximized when he is faced with a jihadist insurgency, rather than a more moderate one, as external support for IS and ANF is much lower than would be the case if, say, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) were in their position and had their resources and manpower.

Benefits to Insurgent Groups

The benefits to insurgent groups from the Assad regime's decision to cooperate are numerous, and include both direct and indirect benefits. The most direct benefit has been the money that the Assad regime paid for oil and gas harvested from insurgent-controlled territory. This money, according to Western intelligence services, amounts to millions of dollars,[23] which, along with proceeds from other illicit activities, has made IS in particular one of the best-financed militant groups currently extant.[24] Second, IS' and ANF's ranks have been swelled by the prisoners Assad had released from prison. While accurate information on the personnel of ANF and IS is hard to come by, testimonials suggest that some share of both organizations is made up of former prisoners released by Assad.[25]

The aforementioned militant groups have also benefited indirectly from Assad's relative military restraint in dealing with them. This restraint means that IS and ANF are stronger than they would otherwise have been, both in absolute terms and relative to other insurgent groups with which they frequently clash. Not having to focus their energies on the Assad regime—except when they desire—has allowed IS and ANF to secure their territorial gains, eliminate hostile opposition, and even begin the process of building Islamist governmental and societal institutions.[26] Another indirect benefit has been an increase in the legitimacy attached to IS and ANF as pseudo-states. Both of these organizations can capitalize on their relative success to attempt to build support among the populations of the areas they control, and boost recruiting among these populations.

Costs to Insurgent Groups

It is not clear what costs, if any, the militant groups incur by allowing Assad to cooperate with them. There is little reason to suspect that supporters of IS and ANF would be upset if they knew that Assad was releasing fellow insurgents, refraining from all-out attacks against them, and even purchasing oil from them; and many of them are probably not even aware of this arrangement. More generally, since IS and ANF are not, in turn, supporting the Assad government, it is unclear on what grounds any of these groups' domestic or international supporters would object to the quasi-cooperative arrangement between them and Assad.

General Applications of the Syrian Case: when are Target Governments likely to Cooperate with Militant Groups that Target them?

The situation wherein governments cooperate with militants who are actively opposing them is no doubt rare, but it is not unheard of. During the Algerian civil war, the government was accused of collaborating with the more extreme of the opposition groups, the Groupe Islamique Armée (GIA), even as the latter sought the overthrow of the government.[27] The State of Israel, as well, was involved in the inception and financing of the organization that eventually became Hamas, although admittedly before that organization's embrace of violence as a tactic.[28] Furthermore, governments' understandable reluctance to admit involvement in any sort of support for a hostile militant group means that the phenomenon may be more common than is realized. In any case, the strategic logic of a government's support for an adversarial militant group tends to remain constant across time and space. Embattled or threatened governments wish to 1) splinter opposition forces, while 2) discrediting their demands and 3) minimizing the chances of foreign involvement.

Yet the rarity of confirmed instances of this phenomenon raises a significant question: under what circumstances, if any, will it happen again? It is difficult to make deterministic statements about insurgent-regime cooperation precisely because of the apparent paucity of cases, yet certain characteristics of the Syrian example can offer preliminary indications about when parallel situations are more likely to occur. The first aspect of the Syrian case that would seem to be a necessary condition for a regime to consider collaborating with hostile militants is a severely threatened, unstable government. Only a government faced with an existential threat, and confronting the very real possibility of a foreign intervention, would consider working with the very insurgency that threatens it. In the case of Syria, Assad was especially attuned to the threat of insurgency given that the protests that eventually deteriorated into civil war began in the context of the 2011 Arab Spring. Governments that support insurgents on their own soil, it seems reasonable to say, would also need to be autocratic in nature, since only a government relatively immune to constituent disapproval—and able to constrict the flow of information—could realistically entertain the idea of supporting insurgents.

Another condition apparently necessary to the success of an insurgent-regime cooperative strategy, is a fractured opposition. Assad's strategy in Syria was premised on the possibility of fuelling infighting among Sunni insurgents. Without pre-existing divisions among the rebels, the support he provided would have contributed directly to military actions against the regime, instead of abetting inter-insurgent violence. Importantly, in order for an Assad-like strategy to work, the divisions among the opposing forces must be deep, and not limited to debates over appropriate military strategy or even means-related questions like the morality of certain forms of violent resistance. Instead, the divisions must be ends-related, much as, say, the FSA and IS disagreement over the extent to which Islamic law should be the basis of future governance in Syria. It is such disagreements that pitted them against each other. If the dispute had been more minor, no doubt, the Assad regime would have remained the more pressing and the more dangerous threat to all

elements of the insurgent cause.

Conclusion

The case of Syria provides a wealth of possible future research directions for scholars. Traditional scholarship on the relation of insurgents and governments has centered on state-sponsored militant groups, which are sponsored by governments to attack *other* governments. Alternatively, there is also significant research on civilian victimization, whereby governments commit hostile acts against their own citizens, and either claim credit for them to suppress dissent, or disguise their involvement to justify the removal of civil liberties. Finally, there has been some discussion of how competition between militant groups affects their longevity and attainment of their goals.[29] Yet scholarship is scarce on the relations between governments and the militant groups that both oppose them and are supported by them, probably because of the seeming illogic of this situation. Most observers assume, quite reasonably, that hostile actors will act in a hostile manner toward one another. Yet the evidence examined in this Research Note demonstrates that this is not always the case. Furthermore, there is reason to believe that, under certain circumstances, a strategy such as that chosen by Assad could be repeated by another besieged regime, as some accounts maintain that it has already been the case in Algeria.

This Research Note makes several contributions to the literature on insurgent-government relations: it demonstrates that Syria has made use of an insurgent-regime cooperative strategy; discusses circumstances under which this is more likely to occur elsewhere; and contributes more generally to an understanding of the circumstances under which hostile actors are likely to collaborate tacitly. In the future, more primary sources-based research is needed to discover whether verifiable instances of insurgent-regime cooperation have in fact occurred elsewhere. Potential candidate states can be identified by consulting the conditions outlined in the course of this Research Note.

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Notes

[1] The Assad government's tendency to avoid engaging IS and ANF was more pronounced in the early stages of the conflict, for reasons discussed below.

[2] For evidence of cooperation between the Assad regime and Islamist rebels, see Ruth Sherlock and Richard Spencer, "Syria's Assad accused of boosting al-Qaeda with secret oil deals," *The Telegraph*, January 20, 2014; Richard Spencer, "Syria's duplicity over al-Qaeda means West will not trust Assad," *The Telegraph*, January 20, 2014; Julian Borger and Mona Mahmood, "EU decision to lift Syrian oil sanctions boosts jihadist groups," *The Guardian*, May 19, 2013; Ian Black, "Assad and Maliki unite against common enemy Isis," *The Guardian*, June 26, 2014; Aryn Baker, "Is the Assad Regime in League with al-Qaeda?" *Time*, January 27, 2014; Cassandra Vinograd and Ammar Cheikh Omar, "Syria, ISIS Have Been 'Ignoring' Each Other on the Battlefield, Data Suggests," *NBC News*, December 11, 2014.

[3] This Research Note does not seek to argue that the Assad regime is actively cooperating with IS or ANF, but rather that each, at times, has benefitted from the other's presence in Syria, for reasons discussed in a later section. The scope of their cooperation has mainly been one of mutual, implicit avoidance, contrary to the conspiracy theories voiced by many Syrian rebel groups. This has also not precluded direct, armed confrontation, especially as IS continued since early 2014 to grow stronger in Syria and Iraq. The purpose of this Research Note, therefore, is not to illuminate an active collaboration between Assad and jihadists, but rather to explore the more general question of under what circumstances target governments and militant groups each benefits from having the other as a foil.

[4] For an analysis of the various regional and international players in the Syrian Civil War, see Emile Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

[5] Michael Gordon, "Iran's Support Emboldens Assad, Envoy Says," *The New York Times*, March 21, 2013; Stacy Meichtry, "Russian support of Assad upends peace

talks,” *The Wall Street Journal, Eastern Edition*, February 14, 2014; Sam Dagher, “Hezbollah Chief pledges to aid Assad regime,” *The Wall Street Journal, Eastern Edition*, May 1, 2013; Michael Gordon and Mark Landler, “Move to Expand Support to Syrian Rebels Gains Speed Among Western Nations,” *The New York Times*, April 11, 2013; Ben Brumfield and Barbara Starr, “Kerry, key allies in Qatar for talks on Syrian rebels’ support,” *CNN Wire*, June 22, 2013; Nic Robertson, “Saudi support for Syrian rebels shaped by tribal, religious ties,” *CNN Wire*, August 20, 2012; Toby Harnden Washington, “Eleven states pledge ‘all necessary’ help for Syria rebels,” *The Sunday Times* (London), June 23, 2013.

[6] Joshua Landis, “The Syrian Uprising of 2011: Why the Assad Regime is Likely to Survive to 2013,” *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Spring 2012), pp. 72-84; Ian Black, “Splits widen within Syrian opposition,” *The Guardian*, July 25, 2012.

[7] For an analysis of the Sinjar Records, see Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, “Al-Qa’ida’s Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records,” *Combating Terrorism Center* (West Point); for a discussion of the Syrian government’s connections to jihadist groups, see Matthew Levitt, “Syria’s Financial Support for Jihad,” *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Winter 2010); and Ryan Mauro, “Has Damascus Stopped Supporting Terrorists?” *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Summer 2009).

[8] Raniah Salloum, “From Jail to Jihad: Former Prisoners Fight in Syrian Insurgency,” *Der Spiegel Online*, October 10, 2013; Jason Lewis, “Syria releases the 7/7 ‘mastermind,’” *The Telegraph*, February 4, 2012.

[9] For an example of Assad’s frequent characterization of insurgent groups as “terrorists,” see:

http://www.presidentassad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=307&Itemid=468.

[10] Ruth Sherlock and Richard Spencer, “Syria’s Assad accused of boosting al-Qaeda with secret oil deals.”

[11] Ibid.

[12] See, for example, Martin Chulov, “Syrian opposition turns on al-Qaida-affiliated Isis jihadists near Aleppo,” *The Guardian*, January 3, 2014; Khaled Yacoub Oweis, “Group linked to al Qaeda regains ground in northeast Syria,” *Reuters*, January 12, 2014; Dominic Evans, “Syrian rebels launch fierce offensive against al Qaeda fighters,” *Reuters*, January 4, 2014; Cassandra Vinograd and Ammar Cheikh Omar, “Syria, ISIS Have Been ‘Ignoring’ Each Other on the Battlefield, Data Suggests.”

[13] Ibid; Julian Borger and Mona Mahmood, “EU decision to lift Syrian oil sanctions boosts jihadist groups.”

[14] See, for example, Aymenn Al-Tamimi, “The Assad Regime and Jihadis: Collaborators and Allies?” *Syria Comment* (blog operated by Joshua Landis), available at <http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/assad-regime-jihadis-collaborators-allies/>.

[15] “Syrian troops beheaded’ in Raqqa,” *Aljazeera*, July 26, 2014; “Al-Nusra Front jihadists claim Damascus suicide bombs,” *The Telegraph*, May 12, 2012; “Syrian warplanes hit Islamic State-run bakery, training camp: monitor,” *Reuters*, September 6, 2014; Mohammad Ghannam, “2 Military Bases in Syria Fall to Rebels,” *New York Times*, December 15, 2014.

[16] Quoted in Jamie Dettmer, “Washington and London Ignored Warnings about the ISIS Offensive in Iraq,” *The Daily Beast*, June 24, 2014.

[17] “Islamic State killed 270 in Syrian gas field battle,” *Reuters*, July 19, 2014.

[18] “Maliki confirms Syrian planes have bombed ISIS positions,” *The Guardian*, June 26, 2014; “Syrian warplanes hit Islamic State-run bakery, training camp: monitor,” *Reuters*, September 6, 2014.

[19] “U.S., Britain cut aid to rebels in northern Syria after Islamic radicals beat Western-backed opposition forces,” *CBS/Reuters*, December 11, 2013.

[20] Ann Curry, “Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister: We Warned About ISIS All Along,” *NBC News*, September 29, 2014.

[21] “The jihadists may have gone too far,” *The Economist*, January 11, 2014; Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, “ISIS is Losing its Greatest Weapon: Momentum,” *The Atlantic*, January 6, 2015.

[22] See, for example, Ian Black, “Bashar al-Assad is West’s ally against Isis extremists, says Syria,” *The Guardian*, July 13, 2014.

[23] Ruth Sherlock and Richard Spencer, “Syria’s Assad accused of boosting al-Qaeda with secret oil deals.”

[24] Though oil deals have only made up a small fraction of IS’s funds, they alone are significant. For analyses of the provenance of IS funding, see Zachary Laub and Jonathan Masters (Eds.), “Islamic State in Iraq and Syria,” *Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounders*, available at <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/islamic-state-iraq-syria/p14811>; Robert Tait, “ISIS’ half-a-billion-dollar bank heist makes it world’s richest terror group,” *The Telegraph*, June 14, 2014; Eoghan Macguire and Randi Kaye,

“How has ISIS become one of the richest ever militant groups?” *CNN*, June 22, 2014. And, while oil revenues have declined in recent months as a result of military defeats and falling crude oil prices, they remain exceptional by the standards of most militant groups.

[25] Ruth Sherlock and Richard Spencer, “Syria’s Assad accused of boosting al-Qaeda with secret oil deals.”

[26] See, for example, An Employee of the *New York Times* and Ben Hubbard, “Life in a Jihadist Capital: Order With a Darker Side: In a Syrian City, ISIS Puts Its Vision Into Practice,” *The New York Times*, July 23, 2014; Cassandra Vinograd and Ammar Cheikh Omar, “Syria, ISIS Have Been ‘Ignoring’ Each Other on the Battlefield, Data Suggests.”

[27] See GIA (Groupe Islamique Armée), *MEDEA*, available at <http://www.medeabe/en/countries/algeria/gia-armed-islamic-group/>; Daniel Pipes and Patrick Clawson (interviewers), “Anwar N. Haddam: An Islamist Vision for Algeria,” *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (September 1996), pp. 69-80.

[28] Andrew Higgins, “How Israel Helped to Spawn Hamas,” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 24, 2009.

[29] For a recent example, see Brian J. Phillips, “Enemies With Benefits? Violent Rivalry and Terrorist Group Longevity,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (2015), pp. 62-75.