



“External Actors in Syria II: Assessing the Influence and Interests of Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Israel”

**Wednesday, November 29, 2017
Lancaster Plaza, Beirut**

CONCEPT NOTE

With the Syrian conflict in its seventh year, the violence and tension continue. Not only has this conflict resulted in a massive humanitarian crisis both within the region and in Europe, but it has also drawn regional and international actors into this civil war. To this end, the KAS Syria/Iraq office and Maison du Futur are holding a closed-door workshop that will address the role of foreign actors and interventions in the Syrian conflict. Serving as a follow-up to the one held in December 2016, which shed light on the pro-Assad coalition of Iran, Russia, and Hezbollah, this workshop will focus on the main supporters of the opposition – Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. It will also examine the role of Israel in Syria as well as the impact that these countries have had on the course of the conflict. Additionally, it will determine and analyze the long-term strategic interests and foreign policy goals of said key players, including details regarding their on-the-ground roles.

Out of the main advocates of the opposition in Syria's conflict, Turkey has by far been the most prominent in the last six years. In the context of its fundamental policy reversal in 2016, Ankara launched operation “Euphrates Shield” and directly intervened with troops and special forces in an effort to target ISIS and prevent the Syrian Kurds from forming a contiguous corridor along the Turkish border. Next, Saudi Arabia, in its effort to topple Assad, has contributed to this conflict by providing arms and equipment to various rebel groups throughout the course of the war, and has emerged alongside Turkey as one of the largest foreign backers of the opposition. Similarly, Qatar has also played a role in this conflict and earned itself a place on the list by providing billions of dollars' worth of financial and military support to several opposition groups, and through its controversial ties to al-Qaeda affiliates in Syria. In contrast, Israel's main motivation in the Syrian civil war has been its ongoing conflict with Hezbollah and its fear that Hezbollah could establish a permanent stronghold inside the country. Thus, its airstrikes have targeted Hezbollah positions within Syria, mainly in the vicinity of the Golan Heights, but also in the Damascus region, Homs, and Palmyra.

The motivations and long-term objectives of the four key regional actors must be comprehensively analyzed and taken into consideration in the context of the future of Syria. These issues will be addressed at the one-day, closed-door workshop featuring academics and experts with significant expertise on this topic. The workshop will consist of four panels, each with two speakers and a moderator, followed by a wrap-up panel. The first two panels will last 75 minutes each, while the latter two panels will be 45 minutes each.



PROGRAM

- 09:00 – 09:30 Welcoming words
- 09:30 – 10:45 **Panel 1: Turkey's Syrian Agenda: Between Assad, ISIS, and the Kurds**
- Input 1: Neo-Ottoman *Realpolitik*: Turkey's Regional Interests and Strategy
 - Input 2: Turkey's Policy on the Ground: From Proxy Warfare to Direct Intervention
 - Questions and Answers
- 10:45 – 11:15 **Coffee Break**
- 11:15 – 12:30 **Panel 2: Saudi Arabia's Anti-Iranian Prerogative and the Importance of the Syrian Theatre**
- Input 1: Syria's Significance in Saudi's "Cold War" with Iran
 - Input 2: Saudi Arabia's Political Leverage and Tools of Intervention in Syria
 - Questions and Answers
- 12:30 – 14:00 **Lunch**
- 14:00 – 14:45 **Panel 3: Qatar's Syria Policy in Light of its Regional Ambitions**
- Questions and Answers
- 14:45 – 15:30 **Panel 4: Israel's Engagement in Syria: Preventing the Scenario of an Iranian and Hezbollah Dominated Neighbor**
- Questions and Answers
- 15:30 – 15:45 **Coffee Break**
- 15:45 – 16:45 **Wrap-up: Implications for Syria and the Ongoing Peace Efforts**
- Input 1: Perspectives for the Future of Syria
 - Input 2: Likelihood of a Plausible Political Solution