

Demystifying the Syrian Conflict

Chatham House, London | 01 March 2018

Seven years into the Syrian conflict, many of the dynamics on the ground in Syria remain misunderstood or misrepresented, leading to oversimplification at best and problematic approaches to the crisis at worst. This conference aims to shed light on the issues that are among the least understood in the Syrian context, including the opacity of regime areas, the composition and motivation of rebel factions, the future of areas liberated from ISIS, and the crucial roles of civil society and local communities. The conference will gather leading policymakers, experts and civil society leaders to examine the key challenges and opportunities faced on the ground in Syria today.

08.30 - 09.00 *Registration and Refreshments*

09.00 – 10.30 *Session 1: Regime Area Dynamics*

This session will explore the role and nature of pro-regime militias and their relationship with the regime. It will also examine the prospects for reconstruction in these areas from the perspectives of the regime, local players, and international actors.

Speakers

Sinan Hatahet, Omran for Strategic Studies

Wael Sawah, The Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression

Jihad Yazigi, The Syria Report

Moderator: Lina Sinjab, BBC

10.30 - 11.00 *Refreshments*

11.00 – 12.30 *Session 2: Rebel-held Area Dynamics*

The panel will discuss the relationship between different rebel groups and their composition and governance models, in addition to examining the dynamics between the groups and local communities. The panel will also explore the prospects for reconstruction in these areas and the role that international and local actors might play in achieving this.

Speakers

Basel Al Juanidy, Al Sharq Forum

Zaina Erhaim, Independent Analyst

Further Speakers TBC

Moderator: Lina Khatib, Chatham House

12.30 – 13.30 *Lunch*

13.30 – 15.00 Session 3: Post-ISIS Areas

This session will focus on dynamics in northeast Syria, including Der Ez Zor, Raqqa, and Rojava, looking at local leadership and governance structures in these areas post-ISIS. It will also examine the role of external actors in the region and reflect on the future of ISIS.

Speakers

Assaad Al Achi, Baytna Syria

Haid Haid, Chatham House

Rana Khalaf, Independent Consultant

Moderator: Tamara Rifai, Independent Analyst

15.00 – 15.30 Refreshments**15.30 – 17.00** Session 4: Civil Society and Communities

The panel will reflect on the challenges faced by civil society actors across Syria and their relationships with international players, in addition to discussing their prospective roles in different areas including the peace process. The panel will also examine the changing nature of relationships between communities, the prospect of return, and their implications for the future.

Speakers

Maria Al-Abdeh, Women Now

Oula Ramadan, Badael

Salim Salamah, University of Oxford

Moderator: Laila Alodaat, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)

17.00 Reception

This conference is organised by the Chatham House Middle East and North Africa Programme and forms part of a broader project on Syria from Within. The discussion will be held on the record.