

2 Understanding of the situation in ‘free’ Syria, prevalent threats and implications for AJACS

2.1 Adaptive implementation driven by informed timely analysis of the situation and context

The situation in Syria is highly dynamic, offering both risks and opportunities for AJACS. FCO needs a service provider with deep contextual understanding of developments on the ground and ability to use the information to achieve their objectives. Our extensive monitoring including mapping through Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software and innovative use of technology combined with strong indigenous local networks will ensure AJACS remains relevant and allow us to identify, recommend and implement appropriate timely interventions for scaling up/down. In doing so we will ensure AJACS’ money and resources are targeted in the most effective way to maximise the programme’s overall impact.

Threat	Coffey’s mitigation
Identified border crossing becoming inaccessible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification and use of other potential border crossings - Bab Al-Salam, Bab Al-Hamsa and Al-Ramtha (Jordan). • Plans in place to redirect AJACS people at short notice. • Manage and minimise border crossings and out of country interactions by utilising remote communication and cascading training models.
S&J becomes less of a priority to moderate opposition in Syria.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use in-country resources to identify entry points within target groups in Syria and scale up/down interventions accordingly. • Focus on programme delivery in Turkey e.g. IG capacity development, bringing stakeholders into Turkey for training.
Divisions within the Syrian National Coalition prevent AJACS facilitating partnerships between IG and moderate opposition in Syria.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure buy-in from relevant groups within Syrian National Council (SNC) e.g. Syrian Military Council by opening lines of communication.
AJACS interventions inadvertently result in a rise in incidents between groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opposition mapping to identify allegiances of groups • Use of political economy analysis and conflict analysis tools identifies potential areas of friction and allows for early introduction of mitigation measures • Target those with an established history of collaboration
AJACS inadvertently benefitting extremist elements in the opposition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opposition mapping to identify allegiances of groups • Effective targeting of resources and ability to scale up/down • Remote monitoring and use of technology to track support.

Table 1: Potential threats and mitigation measures

2.2 Diminishing of rebel forces poses a number of challenges to implementation.

2.2.1 The rise of the Islamic State (IS)

The rise of IS is a key concern for the delivery and success of AJACS. IS emerged following a split in rebel forces at the beginning of 2014. By 1 July following continuous fighting, IS finally gained control of the border town Al-Bukamal. By 9 July IS were in control of the majority of eastern Deir ez-Zor governorate as Al Nusra Front (ANF) and a number of rebel groups retreated. From here, the IS continued to push across north-western Syria eventually consolidating their hold of a large area in northern Syria. This push also saw IS militants take control of Turkman Barh, al-Ghawz, Dabeq and Arshaf roughly 50 km north east of Aleppo.

2.2.2 Consolidation of territory by government forces

Widespread rebellion throughout Syria and thin spreading of the Syrian Army resulted in heavy losses and a forced withdrawal of government forces from rural areas during 2013. However, the regime’s tight control over the military, support from Hezbollah, continued air support and heavy artillery meant that the government has regained control

throughout a number of urban centres during 2014 and have conducted operations around the outskirts of Damascus. While government forces are not in direct control of large areas of Syria, these operations have resulted in government forces re-establish control of a number strategically important urban centres as well as vital transport routes to the Mediterranean, into Lebanon and on the highway south to Jordan.

2.2.3 The diminishing area held by rebel forces

The Free Syrian Army (FSA) - the armed sector of the Syrian National Coalition - alongside other rebel groups provides a moderate opposition to Bashar al-Assad's government forces. The FSA initially gained momentum as a large number of defectors joined the anti-government force. However, a lack of organisation and the increasing strength of militant groups such as IS has diminished the ground held by the FSA and other rebel groups during 2014. The FSA and a number of other rebel groups, including ANF continue to battle both the IS and government security forces on a number of fronts in Hama, Aleppo and Dara'a governorate in an attempt to maintain the territory that they currently hold. Ultimately, it is likely that IS and government forces will continue to maintain a significant level of pressure on the FSA and will look to minimise the territory under FSA control.

2.2.4 Implications for the delivery of the programme

The likely result of the diminished FSA foothold is that the areas where AJACS can operate will come under increasing pressure in the coming months. The moderate opposition will increasingly find itself fighting on two fronts and subsequently focussing its attention on maintaining their foothold and less on bolstering their legitimacy through better security and justice delivery. It is imperative that AJACS supports groups and areas where people see and can realise the potential benefits that support from the project can deliver, and scales interventions up and down accordingly. Our people on the ground will be essential to identifying these entry points and we will maintain contact with them on a daily basis to ensure we are kept up to date. If the situation in Syria becomes such that working directly with moderate opposition groups becomes impossible, then we will look to maintain contact remotely using internet based solutions combined with periodic out of country activity in Turkey and Jordan. This would include:

- Remotely facilitated training and workshops to develop their capacity in planning and preparing S&J responses using web based solutions
- Bring community representatives to Turkey (or Jordan) to work with the IG to develop the partnerships and identify opportunities for public partnerships should the situation on the ground improve
- Conducting training in Turkey with relevant stakeholders

The advance of the IS across northern Syria poses a particular logistical threat for AJACS. As figure 3 shows, IS are close to the border crossing at Gaziantep. Given that this is the border crossing most commonly used for transporting money and resources to the moderate opposition in Syria, the IS pose a significant threat to the implementation of AJACS. Were the preferred border crossing to become unusable, there are other UN border crossings that we have identified as safe for the transport of money and resources – Bab Al-Hawa and Al-Ramtha (from Jordan). The former offers the most logical option as it is the closest and enters directly into moderate opposition territory. We will continue to monitor the situation on the ground to determine the most appropriate routes in an out of the country.

2.3 Mapping the fluidity of access and control in Syria

The security situation in Syria remains extremely dynamic with different actors gaining and losing territory on a weekly basis. Our monitoring of the situation will allow us to pre-empt developments and adapt our approach to AJACS implementation as outlined above which will be key to AJACS success.

2.3.1 The changing situation in north-western Syria (31 July 2014 to 15 August 2014)

Between the 31 July and 15 August, IS militants made a rapid advance across northern Aleppo governorate (see figure 3 below). As IS militants took control of Turkman Barh, al-Ghawz, Dabeq and Arshaf, they also pushed north to engage the Kurdish forces at the Ayn al-Arab border crossing into Turkey.

2.3.2 The broader situation in Syria, September 2014

As of 19 August, FSA militants were targeting government installations in Hama and Homs governorate. In Hama governorate, FSA militants targeted a Syrian Air Force base from which aerial raids are regularly conducted. In the contested region of Golan Heights on the shared Syria / Israel, ANF militants took the border crossing of Quneitra.

Following heavy fighting between government forces and ANF militants, the group took control of the crossing while also kidnapping a significant number of UN soldiers.

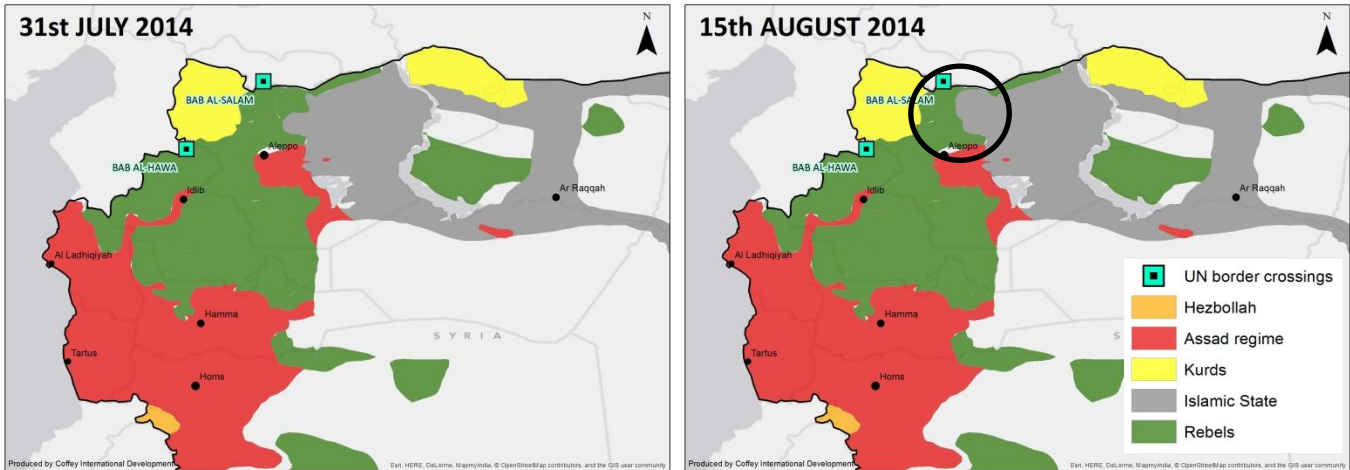


Figure 3: HEAT maps showing IS militants' rapid advance across northern Aleppo governorate.

2.4 The fractured nature of the moderate opposition

The SNC, which established the IG, is a broad coalition of different groups all of which have varying relationships with the moderate opposition in Syria. The IG is not the only organisation with a claim to authority over the FSA, with the Supreme Military Council (SMC) of the Free Syrian Army arguably having a greater claim. The FSA vote in the Minister of Defence for the IG, and a formal chain of command exists between the FSA in Syria and SMC in Turkey headed by Brigadier General Salim Idris. The relationship between the IG and the SMC has been somewhat fractured. The IG tried to remove the head of the SMC and to have its members investigated on corruption charges. This was rejected by both the SMC and SNC on the basis that the IG had no authority over it, a position backed by the SNC.

The SMC could pose a significant stumbling block in AJACS' attempts to develop the IG and moderate opposition's collective capacity to plan and prepare security and justice interventions. The SMC could see it as an attempt to erode their authority over the moderate opposition. This could undermine any attempt to develop the collective capacity of the IG and moderate opposition to plan and prepare security and justice interventions.

We will ensure we foster lines of communication between the IG and the SMC alongside those between the IG and moderate opposition. In doing so, we will aim to get the buy-in of the National Military Council (NMC) to limit any potential resistance from the outset. This will also provide useful additional information that will feed into our situational awareness and analysis, generating a more complete picture.

2.4.1 The moderate opposition in Syria

The Free Syrian Army largely perceived as the banner under which moderate opposition forces function, is arguably more fragmented than the SNC. Many groups act in its name; however, at best they exist as a loose network of brigades with no real chain of command. At worst, the FSA has become little more than a name, with moderate groups functioning independently of one another. More concerning, it has been suggested that some of these groups work with hard-line extremists.

This poses two key challenges to the delivery of AJACS and its objective to develop the capacity of the IG and the moderate opposition in the provision of security and justice. First, the disparate nature of these groups increases the chances of conflict as they vie for control to be the main security and justice providers in a given region. If AJACS were to begin providing money and resources into these regions making it more appealing to be the main S&J provider it could exacerbate tensions and conflict. AJACS could thereby inadvertently contribute to deterioration in security. Second, the claim that some groups are working with hard-line extremists means AJACS interventions could inadvertently benefit those whose influence it is intended to counter.

To limit this the heart of our approach is a sound contextual understanding based on analysis of a wide range of information sources especially our network on the ground that will deliver a sufficiently detailed picture to enable the FCO to determine what support should be delivered where, how and to whom.