



STUDY GUIDE

UNGA DISEC

Deliberation upon the conflict in the Syrian region along with its impact on the socio-political conditions and western relations, with special emphasis on seeking ways to de-escalate the situation



INTRODUCTION TO THE LITERARY CIRCLE

Literary Circle is the club in NIT Durgapur, which gives the college an extra dimension of creative expression in the midst of technical unilateralism and gives the students of the college an opportunity to transcend the ordinary and mundane. The Literary Circle organizes a plethora of events throughout the year. Verve, The Literary cum Youth Festival of the college and the biggest of its kind in eastern India being one of them. The Literary Circle has successfully pulled off 17 editions of Verve till now. Flagship events in the fest have become the matter of college folklore. The club maintains a blog, The Darkest White, as the culmination of myriad pen strokes from the collective literary expression of the college. The club publishes the yearbook, so each student graduating out of college can reminisce about their days in the college, their hostel life and take with them a part of it. Humans of NIT Durgapur, by The Literary Circle, captures the untold stories, legends, and experiences of individuals, showing our readers how ordinary people can be unique, inspirational and relatable. The TEDx is an initiative where influential speakers are invited in order to realize TED's overall mission to research and discover "ideas worth spreading."

TEDxNITDurgapur was co-organised by The Literary Circle and was a confluence of ideas and innovation. The club is known to be highly selective in its admission of new members, with only about 10-15 students inducted out of the entire batch of 900 each year. Great believers of the phrase 'quality over quantity', the members selected every year are the best of the best in the field of expression and creativity. Come, step into the Circle!

ABOUT NITMUN

NITMUN is a forum convened by the members of the Literary Circle for discussion and analysis of global issues. It seeks to bring out motivated delegates from all over the country for a meaningful debate on significant international issues. Our greatest goal is to make sure that each delegate learns how to tackle world issues better at the end of the conference as the world is in dire need of young leaders now. Currently, in its 11th edition, NITMUN has been extremely successful in providing the perfect experience to each delegate. Over the years, we have entertained more than 2000 delegates totalling all the editions. Delegates arrive from all corners of India for an experience they will never forget.

INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

The Disarmament and International Security Committee (1st Committee of the UN General Assembly) deals with disarmament, global challenges and threats to peace that affect the international community and seeks out solutions to the challenges in the international security regime.

Though the Security Council (UNSC) is the only UN body capable of imposing force upon Member States (economically, militarily, or otherwise), the First Committee makes valuable recommendations to the Security Council on all aspects of matters that place global peace at risk.

Because the First Committee's legislative process incorporates the voice of every Member State to the UN, its resolutions are always respected and considered by the Security Council. These resolutions are also salient due to their normative nature.

The Syrian Civil War is an ongoing violent conflict in Syria between pro-democratic insurgents and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's long-standing dynastic regime. The Syrian Arab Republic has faced more than a decade of humanitarian crisis and has left its people facing one of the most complex emergencies in the world. Two thirds of the population requires assistance because of a worsening economic crisis, continued localized hostilities, mass displacement and devastated public infrastructure.

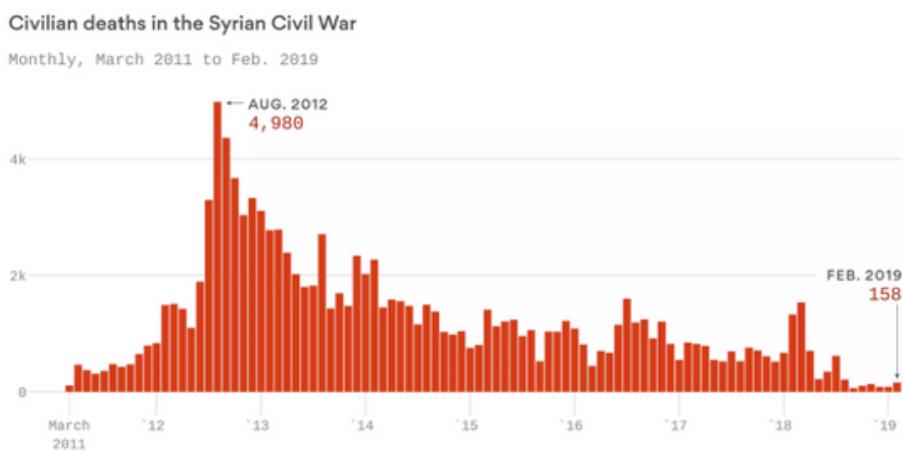
Around 90 per cent of families in the country live in poverty, while more than 50 per cent are food insecure. By the end of three days through this committee, we aim at making sure that each delegate learns how to tackle world issues better at the end of the conference as the world is in dire need of young leaders now.



GENERAL OVERVIEW

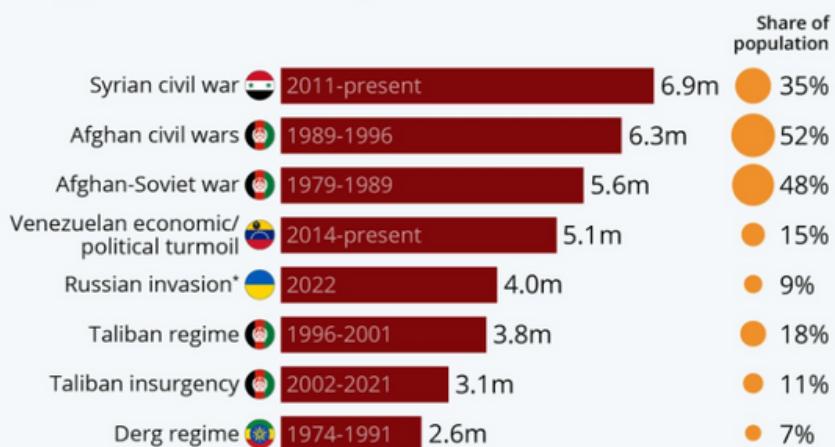
Syria has been at war since 2011. Many people were dissatisfied with the high unemployment rate, widespread corruption, and lack of political freedom. Between 2006 and 2010, Syria experienced the worst drought in the country's modern history. Hundreds of thousands of farming families were reduced to poverty, causing a mass migration of rural people to urban shantytowns. Peaceful protests began in March, inspired by the 'Arab spring' uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. However, the government reacted quickly to the peaceful protests. Protests erupted across the country when the government used lethal force to crush dissent. The violence quickly escalated, eventually resulting in a brutal war.

Both Assad's military and opposition factions have repeatedly targeted civilians in regions outside of their authority. The deaths of about 1,400 civilians in the summer of 2013 as a result of chemical weapons used by the Assad administration galvanized foreign powers to eliminate the regime's chemical arsenal. However, in the years afterwards, the Syrian government has utilized lethal conventional weapons, resulting in significant civilian losses.



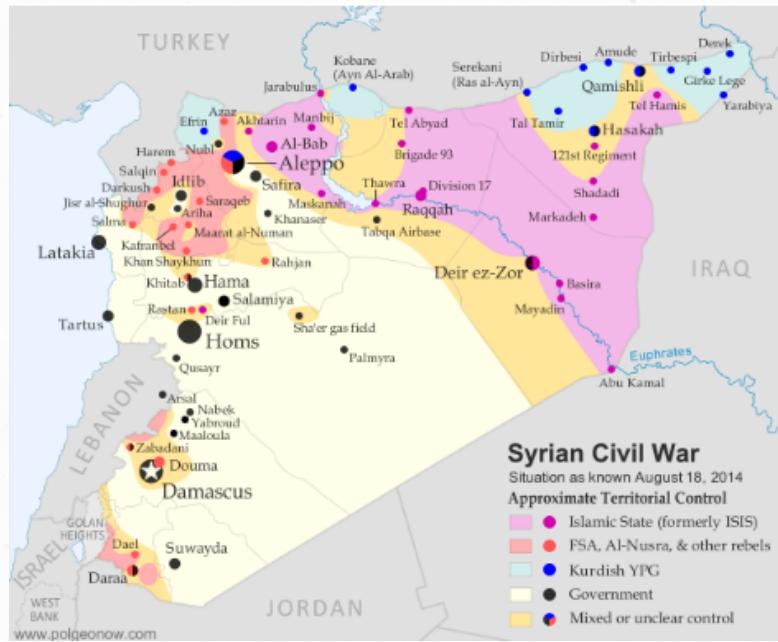
The conflict has displaced more than half of Syria's pre-war population of 22 million people, with more than six million internally displaced and another six million fleeing abroad. With few job and educational possibilities and little possibility of returning safely home, almost one million migrants have traveled to Europe, contributing to what the UN has called the greatest migration and refugee crisis since World War II.

Largest refugee crises since 1960 by peak number of refugees



During the course of the war, Syria became the scene for a complex series of intersecting conflicts involving many internal and international actors pursuing their own interests and goals. The conflict has become increasingly international in character, drawing the involvement of countries such as the United States (US), Russia, Turkey, Iran, Israel and others. The conflict is viewed as being more about the geopolitical future of the Middle East rather than only about Syria. Complex alliances, shifting allegiances, rivalries and conflicting interests between the actors involved continue to affect the balance of power and to foster uncertainty. There is still no clear path to peace. The Syrian conflict has turned into a complex, three-part war. It involves Turkish-backed forces of the Syrian National Coalition in the northwest who are fighting Syrian government forces, but are also opposed to US-backed Syrian Kurdish control in the northeast.

Turkish-backed forces in the northwest, are adamant that any peace agreement involves transitioning away from Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. With a new US President in power, it is hoped that US foreign policy may create a resolution between Turkey and the Syrian Kurds, but that could complicate any peace agreement.



There is hope, however. Within Syria, families demonstrate incredible resilience and resourcefulness, creating homes, running schools and businesses and giving children some sense of normality, all within displacement camps and beyond Syria's borders, an emerging generation of young refugees are building their skills and seeking solutions through further education, determined to rebuild their shattered country when they can at last return.



Key Terms:

Al-Nusra Front:

Al-Nusra Front or Jabhat al-Nusra, often known as al-Qaeda in Syria or al-Qaeda in the Levant, was a Salafist jihadist terrorist group that fought against Syrian government forces during the Syrian Civil War. Its goal was to turn the nation into an Islamic state. It was designated as al-Qaeda's recognized Syrian affiliate in April 2013.

Free Syrian Army:

Since its inception in the summer of 2011, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) has evolved tremendously. It was established with the ambition of representing a nationwide resistance organization intended to protect peaceful demonstrators and to launch military operations against the Assad administration. The FSA remains the cornerstone brand of Syria's moderate resistance, representing the original moderate vision of the revolution.

Tahrir-al-sham:

Tahrir-al-Sham is a Sunni Islamist military group active in Syria's civil war. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) was created in 2017 as a result of a merger between al-Nusra Front (ANF) and numerous other organizations. As one of al-Qaeda's affiliates in Syria, HTS controls a section of territory in northwest Syria with the goal of deposing Syria's Assad regime and replacing it with a Sunni Islamic state to achieve its own agenda. Since its foundation, HTS has held several Americans hostage.

Ba'ath Party:

The Ba'ath Party is a pan-Arabist political party that advocates for the establishment of a single Arab socialist nation. It has affiliates in numerous Middle Eastern nations and ruled Syria from 1963 to 2003 and Iraq from 1968 to 2003. The Baathists in both nations faced substantial threats to their power in the twenty-first century. The Iraq War led to the demise of the party's Iraqi chapter in 2003. In 2011, Arab Spring protests attempted to overthrow the Syrian government, but it prevailed after the civil war that resulted from its ruthless repression of the demonstrations.

Arab Spring:

Arab Spring, wave of pro-democracy protests and uprisings that took place in the Middle East and North Africa beginning in 2010 and 2011, challenging some of the region's entrenched authoritarian regimes. The protest against Basher-al-Assad's regime was a part of the Arab Spring.



Iran–Saudi Arabia proxy conflict:

The Iran–Saudi Arabia proxy conflict, often known as the Middle Eastern Cold War, is Iran and Saudi Arabia's continuous struggle for influence in the Middle East and other Muslim regions. The two nations have supported opposite sides in adjacent crises, such as the civil wars in Syria and Yemen, to varying degrees.

Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria:

The Autonomous Administration of Northern and Eastern Syria (AANES), also known as Rojava, is a de facto autonomous region in northeastern Syria. It includes autonomous sub-regions in the regions of Afrin, Jazira, Euphrates, Raqqa, Tabqa, Manbij and Deir Ez-Zor. The region gained de facto autonomy in 2012 amid the ongoing conflict in Rojava and the broader Syrian civil war in which its official military force, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), joined.

Kofi Annan peace plan for Syria:

On March 16, Kofi Annan, the joint representative of the UN and the Arab League for Syria, presented a six-point peace proposal to the UN Security Council. In discussions with the Syrian government and opposition, Annan presented the plan as a road map for putting a stop to the bloodshed and addressing the crisis brought on by a year-long revolt against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Geneva II conference:

The Geneva II Conference on Syria was a United Nations-sponsored international peace conference on Syria's future. Its purpose was to bring the Ba'athist administration and the opposition together to discuss the best way to establish a transitional government for Syria with complete executive authority, thereby putting an end to the Syrian Civil War. The conference happened on January 22, 2014 in Montreux, January 23, 2014 – January 31, 2014 in Geneva (Switzerland), and again on February 10 – February 15, 2014.

TIMELINE

2006–2010:

Between 2006 and 2010, Syria was hit by a terrible drought that severely damaged its most productive fields. Almost 60% of the country became a desert during the four-year drought. Agriculture had higher unemployment due to the drought and water deficit.

January–March, 2011:

Minor demonstrations demanding political change started in January and persisted through March. Massive anti-Hosni Mubarak demonstrations were taking place in Cairo at the time, and activists in Syria called for a "Day of Rage" against the Bashar al-Assad regime on February 3 via the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter.

February, 2011:

Small demonstrations against President Asad's rule for political reforms, the repeal of the emergency law, etc. started to appear in various parts of Syria. A group of teenage boys who wrote "It's your turn, Doctor" in graffiti in the city of Daraa as part of the protests were detained.

March-May, 2011:

The EU bans import and transport of oil and other petroleum products from Syria which greatly affected the Syrian public and businesses. Increased demonstrations calling for the release of the young protesters took place in Dara and Apello. Over a thousand civilians were killed as a result of the Syrian army's mass arrests and shootings in retaliation for the protests. As a result, some refugees started crossing the border into Turkey, prompting the protesters to take up arms.

July, 2012:

The Geneva I conference hosts the meeting of the Action Group for Syria, which is made up of the six UN Security Council members, the European Union, Turkey, Iraq, Qatar, and Kuwait. The Geneva Communiqué calls for the implementation of the Annan peace plan.

Early August, 2012:

Annan, who was there in Syria to foresee the implementation of the UN sponsored ceasefire, resigned from his position as Joint Special Envoy, citing Bashar Al-Assad's refusal to carry out the Annan peace plan, the intensifying rebel military campaign, and the lack of consensus among UN Security Council members. The Al-Assad regime is being accused of "genocide" by Prime Minister Riyad Hijab, who has defected to Jordan.

Late August, 2012:

President Obama draws a "red line" and threatens to use military force if the Al-Assad regime uses chemical weapons against its opponents. A gas attack, however, on the outskirts of Damascus kills hundreds of civilians without drawing a military response from the US.

Jan-September, 2014:

An al Qaeda offshoot takes control of Raqqa before advancing into Syria and Iraq, establishing a caliphate, and changing its name to Islamic State. Washington forms a coalition against the Islamic State and launches airstrikes, aiding Kurdish forces in turning the tide of jihadism but causing tension with Turkey, an ally.

2015:

As Assad's forces lose ground in numerous towns and cities that rose up against his one-party Baath rule, an Islamist militant insurgency made up of former protesters and army defectors is gradually weakened with the aid of foreign jihadists entering Syria. Russia joins the conflict on Assad's side, sending planes and providing military support that, when combined with Iranian assistance, quickly changes the tide of battle against the rebels.

2016:

Turkey launches an incursion with allied rebels in response to Kurdish advances near the border, creating a zone under Turkish control that it later expanded in 2018. After months of bombardment and siege, the Syrian army and its allies ultimately defeat the rebels in Aleppo, their largest urban base, confirming Assad's momentum.

Late 2016:

Following the failure of a brief cease-fire, Russia and the Syrian government forces start launching frequent airstrikes on Aleppo's rebel-held areas. After the last rebel soldiers were removed from the city on December 22, the Syrian government proclaimed victory in Aleppo.

April 7, 2017:

In retaliation for a chemical weapons attack launched by government forces against rebels in Khn Shaykh, the United States attacked Shayrat air base, a government-controlled air force base, with numerous cruise missiles.

June-July, 2018:

To retake the southwest from rebel forces, Syrian government forces launch an offensive. The attack initially targets the province of Dar before spreading to the neighboring regions, which includes the province of Al-Qunayirah. Rebels are forced to submit in exchange for safe passage to the province of Idlib, and the area is eventually successfully taken.

Dec 2019 – March 2020:

The Russian-led offensive in northwest Syria has displaced approximately one million civilians, creating the worst humanitarian crisis since the conflict began. Ankara sends thousands of troops across the border to help halt the offensive. Turkey says it will not prevent Syrian refugees from reaching Europe and has opened its borders. Thousands flee to Greece.

June, 2020:

The United States introduces the "Caesar Act," which includes broader powers to freeze assets of anybody engaging with Syria, regardless of nationality, and covers more sectors ranging from construction to energy.

KEY PLAYERS

IRAN: Iran, often referred to as Syria's closest ally, has been a vocal supporter of both the Assad regime and the Lebanon-based group Hezbollah, providing both with military and economic assistance. While the two countries represent different religious majority populations, Syria representing a Sunni-Arab majority and Iran representing a Persian-Shia majority, their partnership is strategic. Iran has been the Assad regime's backbone since the beginning of the civil war in Syria, assisting it in maintaining power. Should the Assad regime remain in power after the civil war ends, Syria would owe a significant debt to Iran, something that worries the international community. Apart from providing the Syrian government with troops and training, Iran has also established military command centers and deployed advanced weapons systems in Syria, including long-range missiles, drones, radar systems and air defense capabilities. These moves have been interpreted by the US as projections of power and security threats towards Iran's adversaries in the Middle East, especially Israel. Iran and Israel have been adversaries since 1979 and are 'locked in a low-level conflict in Syria'.

LEBANON : Lebanon continues to be the largest host of Syrian refugees, with over 1.5 million Syrian refugees alone. However, as regulations have tightened in the last two years, it has become increasingly difficult for Syrian refugees to cross the border into Lebanon. Aside from assisting refugees, Lebanon has actively sought to distance itself from Syria's civil war. However, due to Hezbollah's heavy involvement in Syria, Lebanon's efforts to remain neutral may backfire. Lebanon will never completely cut ties with Syria, but if Lebanon is forced into the conflict due to Hezbollah's involvement, it will demonstrate the Assad regime's and Iran's regional strength.

SAUDI ARABIA : Saudi Arabia, a Sunni majority state, has been vocal in its opposition to President Assad, stating that "President Assad cannot be part of a solution to the conflict and must hand over power to a transitional administration or be removed by force." Several Syrian rebel groups have received military and economic assistance from Saudi Arabia, which is also involved in the US-led campaign against the Islamic State. Saudi Arabia's strong opposition to the Assad regime is also likely due to the long-standing rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which is a key ally of the Assad regime in Syria.

SYRIA(ASSAD GOVERNMENT) : Since the July 2000 referendum that elected President Bashar al-Assad with a 97% affirmation, the policies of the government have shifted widely from the once-promised democratic reforms, initiatives against corruption and improvement of the economy. Unlike other countries in the Arab Spring, Assad ordered his security forces to “crush the dissent, rather than tolerate it, and he refused to meet protesters’ demands,” leading to a turn in the Assad regime’s international and national image. The Assad regime is Alawite-led and therefore is in opposition with groups led by Sunnis, which is the major religion of the Syrian opposition.

RUSSIA : Russia has been a constant supporter of the Assad regime, voting against Security Council resolutions condemning Assad or attempting to put sanctions on the regime. Russia has armed Assad, providing both military and economic assistance. Russia’s statement regarding its support of Assad claims that the intervention by other foreign powers, even in a humanitarian capacity, is violating Syria’s sovereignty. However, Russia’s distaste for foreign intervention likely points to a stronger underlying issue, namely that Russia consistently opposed American intervention in foreign affairs. In addition, the potential outcome of a radical Islamist regime provides motivation for Russia to support Assad.

Some experts viewed Russia as the 'dominant external actor in Syria and potentially on its way to becoming 'the leading player in the Middle East'. During the last years, a number of Middle Eastern countries, including Turkey and other traditional US allies such as Israel and Saudi Arabia increased their engagement with Russia by signing wide-ranging agreements, some of which envisaged the purchase of advanced weapons systems. Pro-opposition human rights organizations estimated the number of civilians killed by Russian airstrikes since September 2015 to be between 6700 and 8300.

JORDAN: Jordan has been an active participant in the US plan for intervention in Syria since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War. Jordan, like many other countries, has declared its support for a "peaceful resolution." However, Jordanian officials have stated that Jordan will not intervene in Syria unless there is a "clear and present terrorist threat" to the country's security, referring specifically to ISIL. Jordan's alliance with the US is based in part on their shared fight against ISIL. Furthermore, the Syrian Civil War has made neighboring Jordan one of the region's largest hosts of Syrian refugees.

IRAQ: Because the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), operates across the borders of Syria and Iraq, the two countries are inextricably linked, with Iraq's stability being linked to the outcome of the Syrian Civil War. ISIL has become a common enemy for both Iraq and Syria, and both have worked to eliminate it. Iraq, on the other hand, has a vested interest in a stable Syria. In addition to publicly calling for peace talks between the Assad regime and the opposition, Iraq has privately provided military and economic support to the Syrian opposition. While both Iraq and Iran support Syria, they do so for very different reasons. Iraq fears a post-Assad Syria where the Sunni-led opposition wins, which might then encourage Iraqi Sunnis to revolt and destabilize the power of the current Iraqi regime.

TURKEY: In the last seven years, Turkey's presence in Syria's civil war has grown exponentially, and it is now regarded as one of the crisis's major non-governmental actors. Turkey's initial connection to the Syrian crisis was to weaken the PKK, which has long been considered an outright enemy of Turkey. Further involvement by Turkey in the Syrian conflict could ultimately bring the already tenuous relations between Turkey and the US to a boiling point. These tensions have risen steadily since Turkey accused the US of involvement in the 2016 coup attempt, as well as the country's disagreement over the Kurdish issue.

QATAR: Qatar has pledged to "arm Syrian rebels even if Donald Trump withdraws US support for the multinational effort," but "would not 'go solo' and supply shoulder-fired missiles to the rebels" as of November 2016. Qatar has justified its support for nationalist Sunni rebels and opposition to the Assad regime by citing a desire to help build a more stable Syria. Qatar's posturing is in addition to that of Saudi Arabia and Turkey, both of which support the rebels, whom the Assad regime has labeled terrorist organisations. Turkey and Qatar have developed particularly close ties, with both countries publicly declaring their support for Syrian rebels seeking to depose Assad. Their assistance in Syria is primarily military in nature.

UNITED STATES: The United States has been an active participant in the Syrian Civil War, as early as August 2011 when it joined France, Germany, the United Kingdom and others in calling for President Assad's resignation. Throughout the last seven years, the US has varied its involvement from focusing on ridding Syria of chemical weapons, arming the Syrian rebels, and participating in coalition airstrikes to fight ISIL. Most recently, the US has ordered airstrikes against the Assad regime and pledged to arm Kurdish opposition forces in Syria.

HEZBOLLAH : Hezbollah is an armed group that originated among Lebanon's Shia population. Its support for the Assad regime during the Syrian Civil War has been divisive for the Lebanese people as it is an Iran-founded group that had previously fought for Lebanon in the 2006 war with Israel. Therefore, Hezbollah's involvement in this conflict stems primarily from the belief that Syrian opposition forces may destroy its alliance with the Assad regime against Israel. While some in Lebanon's Shia community support this group, there has been some dissatisfaction with the group's stance. Because of this group's discordance in Lebanon, Shia neighborhoods have been targeted by other sects in the country, increasing tension and destabilizing the country.

KURDISTAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT (KRG) : The Kurdistan Regional Government rules in the northern region of Iraq referred to as Iraqi-Kurdistan. It has taken in and given refuge to over 200,000 Syrian refugees in Iraq, or 97% of the total in the country, providing humanitarian aid and security with assistance from the international community. The KRG has made statements condemning attacks within Syria on the Syrian-Kurdish population supporting the United States attacks against the Assad regime as a result of the attacks against Iraqi Kurds by Saddam Hussein's government.

ASSAD REGIME / SYRIAN GOVERNMENT : Hafez al-Assad ruled an authoritarian military regime from 1970 to 2000. His son, Bashar al-Assad, succeeded him and remains in power. The Assad family is part of a ruling elite made up of predominantly Alawites, an offshoot of Shi'i Islam, who make up an estimated 12% of the population. Sunni Muslims comprise 75% of the Syrian population, while Christians make up about 10%. Many Syrians oppose the Assad regime's brutal tactics in dealing with protests and opposition.

CONCLUSION

The Syrian civil conflict has destroyed the nation for more than a decade now, causing a regional humanitarian catastrophe and bringing in actors ranging from the United States to Russia. Even as the conflict winds down, the situation in Syria remains tense, with the possibility of escalating into a full scale war. The motive of this committee would be to find solutions for the conflict, deliberate upon plausible solutions that would satisfy all the parties involved, and bring an end to this struggle for power. Here are some questions for the delegates to get a better understanding of the primary areas of concern.

Questions to be addressed:

- Do we have a plausible solution to address the rising risk of Syria being used by militant organizations to spread terrorism around the world ?
- Is a two state solution like Israel-Palestine the way forward for Syria?
- What's the role of western countries in the war and are they going to negotiate with the Assad regime to bring back stability in the country?
- What will be USA's approach towards this conflict which no longer holds prominence in its foreign policy?
- What happens to the 5.6 million refugees that left the country during the civil war?
- Can Russia compel the Assad administration to implement critical institutional reforms in order to meet Western nations' demands for funding Syria's reconstruction?
- What's been the toll of the war?
- What are the challenges faced in bringing an everlasting peace in syria?
- What's the role of Turkey in the war?
- Is the Assad regime ready to negotiate for a two state solution with the Kurds and if yes, will Russia mediate for the peace talks?

Please keep in mind that these questions are part of a route map and are not exhaustive. We encourage the delegates to display their diplomatic talents and offer realistic solutions to the situation at hand.

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