

**Forum:** Security Council (SC)

**Issue:** Situation in Syria

**Chair:** Naman Sharma, Head Chair & Mehek Berry, Deputy Chair

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## Introduction

In a war-torn nation, Syrian civilians have faced more than their fair share of traumatic experiences -- whether it be shootings, shellings or airstrikes. The armed conflict in Syria sprouted in March 2011 with a plethora of pro-democracy protests emerging in cities such as Daraa. Yet, the Assad regime responded to this violence by killing numerous protesters. Although the United States and other nations acted by issuing sanctions against Assad and senior Syrian officials, the president continued to pursue his vengeance against opposition forces, hence commencing Syria's descent into civil war.

The conflict has thrust a range of humanitarian crises upon Syria. About 11.5 million Syrian civilians have fled the conflict zone to countries such as Egypt, Iran, and Turkey, and it is clear that the region is facing the largest refugee crisis in the world. Chemical weapons and explosive devices have resulted in countless civilian casualties, often because hospitals, schools, and religious sites are targeted. The destruction of hospitals and schools further exacerbates the situation, as injured civilians are often left without proper care and literacy is incredibly low. These issues make it apparent that humanitarian aid is essential in Syria. Preventing human rights abuses is another key factor in solving this issue. Terrorist organizations, such as ISIL, have also caused havoc in the region. The involvement of such extremist organizations adds upon the countless human rights violations carried out by the government and rebels.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Sunni Islam

Islam is a monotheistic religion that teaches belief in Allah. Islam is an Abrahamic religion, placing Muhammad as the messenger of Allah. Islam is split into two major denominations: Sunni and Shia. Sunni Muslims, in short, believe in religious practice primarily based on the words of Muhammad, while Shia Muslims also follow Ali, the cousin of Muhammad. The majority of Muslims are Sunni Muslims, with about 85% of all Muslims being Sunni. Syria is a Muslim Sunni-majority nation.

## **ISIS/ISIL**

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), is a religious extremist group in Syria. They have been labeled as an Islamic fundamentalist organization and a jihadist group. ISIL has been responsible for several human rights violations and is a contributor to the worsening situation in Syria.

## **Refugees and Displaced Persons**

A refugee is an individual displaced from their nation of origin and an internally displaced person is someone displaced within their nation, typically due to conflict or plight. The conflict in Syria has resulted in the largest refugee crisis in the world, forcing 6.7 million Syrians to flee. Currently, there are over 6 million displaced people within Syria as well.

## **Sharia**

In Arabic, sharia is defined as divine law. Sharia is religious law stemming from the fundamental principles of Islam. Most Muslim-majority nations have implemented legal systems influenced by sharia; however, these laws have been largely replaced by statutes shaped by western models. Over the past 30 years, Islamic Movements have arisen calling for the complete implementation of sharia. Aspects of sharia, such as its restrictions upon women and harsh punishments have been criticized by international organizations.

## **Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs)**

Improvised explosive devices are makeshift bombs often deployed in areas of conflict. 40,000 conflict-related civilian deaths have been attributed to IEDs in Syria. Detecting these weapons, due to their unconventional construction, is difficult. They can be built without the use of metal, thus being impervious to metal detectors. IEDs are most commonly used in roadside and suicide bombings targeted at the civilian populations of Afghanistan.

## **Chemical Weapons**

Like IEDs, chemical weapons have been used to inflict massive amounts of pain upon the civilians in Syria. Chemical weapons utilize chemical agents with toxic properties to harm and kill enemies. They have been labeled as Weapons of Mass Destruction and have been condemned by several UN member nations.

## **Jihadist**

In Arabic, jihad refers to a religious struggle against both the physical and spiritual enemies of Islam. In recent years the term has come to mean Islam's religious war. Those who engage in jihad are

referred to as jihadists and often use violence to reach their goals. In the late 20th century, with the Islamic revival, religious fundamentalist groups were labeled as jihadist groups. The Muslim community, however, do not view extremists as jihadists, but rather as “deviants” who use Islam to falsely justify violence.

## Background Information

### Civil War

#### *The Uprising*

In a January 2011 interview by The Wall Street Journal, President Bashar al-Assad claimed that although his nation faced economic hardships, they were not expecting anti-regime protests. After he succeeded his father, Assad started censorship, surveillance, and enforced forceful authoritarian strategies against adversaries of his government. Although he supervised the liberalization of the economy, corrupt capitalists were the only beneficiaries. In March 2011, the first major protests arose in Dar'ā (southern Syria). The regime's response to the protest was violent and fueled the protesters' cause which caused similar civilian protests to emerge around Syria. Armed security forces were filmed beating and firing at peaceful protesters.

#### *The Conflict*

The conflict has been on-going for 8 years. The four main warring factions at the beginning of the conflict were ISIL, the Kurdish forces, the Assad government, and other opposition groups. The conflict began in the latter part of 2011 when organized rebel militant groups began attacking government troops in numerous cities. During this time the Free Syrian Army (a rebel umbrella group) was formed. In the past, multiple inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) have attempted a myriad of efforts to end the conflict; however, the only group able to exert influence over the regime was the Arab League. However, once the Arab League issued an observer mission, the opposition lost trust in them as the Syrian government presented orchestrated scenes of the conflict and restricted their movements.

Former UN Secretary-general, Kofi Anna, organized another agreement with the help of the UN and the Arab League to establish a cease-fire, but violence resumed soon after. They then decided to recruit international powers at the Geneva Communiqué.

As the Syrian National Council (SNC), an umbrella group for the opposition, was weakened by fighting, in November of 2012, Syrian opposition leaders established the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. Assad's troops had to retreat from the

north and east as rebels were gaining power throughout 2012, following an attack on Aleppo, Syria. The SNC was funded and armed by Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar which was followed by the United States' program to train vetted rebel groups, whilst the Syrian government received weapons and fighters from Hezbollah, a militant group.

The following year, daily fighting persisted every day, increasing the death toll of innocent citizens. On August 21st, 2013, the Syrian government was suspected to have killed the citizens using chemical weapons in Damascus. Although the government dismissed all allegations, UN weapons inspectors' investigations have confirmed the use of sarin. This incident was followed up by an agreement between Russia, Syria and the US to remove Syrian chemical weapons and store them under international control. The US, during the Obama administration, attempted to destroy the regime's attempts at attacking the civilians with airstrikes.

As the civil war progressed, militant groups began rising and operating in Syria with numerous opposition groups. This was however overshadowed by the creation of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), created by the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The group occupied several areas in the Euphrates valley and started a plethora of operations to expand their control over territory between the Iraq-Syria border. As they rose to power, the US and a coalition of Arab developed an air campaign to strike ISIL targets in different parts of Syria.

Russia became more active in the war in 2015 by positioning military troops in air bases and launching airstrikes within Syria, targeted at rebel groups fighting against the Assad regime -- in order to strengthen their alliance with Syria. They established a cease-fire between Syrian government forces and Western-backed rebels collapsed in September 2016 and discharged a bombing operation to defeat the rebels. They have also been denounced by human rights groups. Another set of chemical weapons attack was undertaken in Khān Shaykhūn in April 2017 and Douma in 2018, which steered the US, UK, and French forces to initiate 100 strikes at chemical weapons facilities near Damascus and Homs. The Syrian government consolidated their territory around Damascus and Homs and brokered a deal, along with Russia, with the rebels which gave them a safe route to Idlib, a rebel-held province, in exchange for their surrender in southwest Syria. Turkey has deployed military troops in support of the rebels and has been met with retaliation by Syria and Russia as they have bombed border towns surrounding the province in which Turkish forces are stationed. Nonetheless, Russia and Turkey agreed to implement a buffer zone between rebel and government forces. Yet, in 2019, Syrian forces crossed the zone and began attacking different groups in Idlib along with Russian airstrikes.

### ***Situation with Kurds***

In early October 2019, the Trump administration removed US troops from the northern Syrian border, enabling Turkish forces to move forward in attacking Kurdish forces. This resulted in an escalation of chaos in regions where Turkey's proposed safe zone for Syrian refugees to resettle

The Turkish military, along with Syrian rebels, has moved into Kurdish territory and are dividing their enclave. Many Turkish backed Syrian rebels fighting the Kurds are former ISIL and former al Qaeda members in various US outposts (e.g. Kobani, a Kurdish city).

President Bashar al-Assad's Syrian forces are currently asserting their occupancy where Kurdish nationals have established autonomy due to the Syrian Kurds' newly established deal with the government -- hence allowing their troops to take over more land. Before the civil war, the Syrian Kurds' relationship with Syria was extremely strong as they provided the Kurds with accommodation in Damascus. However, forming an alliance with the US has led to the demise of their friendly relationship with Syria.

The Syrian government gains the most from this situation as the regime controls a larger surface area of Syria (with the help of Russia, making them more dependable in the eyes of Assad).

## **Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

### **United States of America (USA)**

From the beginning of the Civil War in 2011, the US imposed sanctions on numerous Syrian officials. President Obama's administration's interest peaked when he claimed that with the use of chemical weapons, Assad had crossed a "red line." Although they did not play a major role in the war between the opposition and Syrian government, the US and its Arab allies initiated air raids against ISIL. In 2015, they created and backed the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a Kurdish-Syrian Arab alliance that received US training and aid. This alliance later drove out jihadists from their last area of territory in March 2019. They continued intervening in 2017 by firing at airbases that were suspected to be the site from where the Idlib chemical attack was launched and was supported by France and the UK in other retaliatory attacks after the chemical attack in Douma. However, in late 2019, the US withdrew forces from the border areas to allow for a "long-planned operation" by Turkish forces against the Kurds.

## Kurds

End of WWI, the Kurds were promised an independent state by western hegemonies but have remained stateless. Nevertheless, they are a US ally and have joined cooperated in tackling militant extremist groups such as ISIL and Saddam Hussein during the Iraq war. A militant Kurdish has established violent attacks in Turkey in the name of autonomy, however, the Turkish government views the Kurdish fighters in Syria as persons of the same group. With the Trump administrations' removal of troops, Turkey decided to wipe out the Kurds and create a "safe-zone" into Syrian territory in late 2019 in order to resettle Syrian refugees and displaced persons living in Turkey due to the civil war.

## Russian Federation

In September of 2015, Russia began providing military assistance to Assad. The government of Russia claimed to have intervened solely to combat the rise of the ISIL, however, Russian troops were reported to have primarily attacked/combatted rebels in Syria. Russian military aid, which mostly involves arming Syrian troops, proved to be a great advantage for Assad and the Syrian government. Russia has also created several military bases in Syria, which include naval, air, and spy compounds. Russia, Syria, and Iran continue to work together politically and militarily. Economically, Russia has invested a great deal in Syrian infrastructure and weaponry.

## Iran

In 2011, the Iranian government began assisting Assad's Regime in a fashion similar to that of Russia, providing financial and military aid. Iran has placed over 5,000 troops in the region to combat extremist organizations and rebels. Iran has not only placed troops but also sent missiles into the region to eliminate ISIL strongholds. Additionally, Iran has trained intelligence, military, and government personnel in Syria. Iran, Russia, and Syria have all expressed their wishes to end terrorism, stop the rebels, and limit US influence in the region.

## The European Union (EU)

The EU condemns the decisions of Assad's regime in his efforts to combat the rebels. Although the EU has not directly intervened in the conflict, the organization has imposed several sanctions against Syria, in order to apply economic pressure. The European Investment Bank halted all programs in Syria once it became clear that Assad had been committing human rights violations. This economic pressure, along with that of the US, is in hopes to isolate the Syrian government. France, after the Paris terror attacks, conducted airstrikes against ISIL. Additionally, France along with the US and UK partook in attacks against several government sites in Syria.

## United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR)

The UNHCR is an organization working towards protecting the lives and rights of refugees, and displaced communities. The organization has reported that about 5.6 million people have fled from the conflict in Syria and have expressed fear that the situation is worsening. The UNHCR, through securing financial aid and funds, works to provide necessities for families in need and improve refugee camps in the region. In 2017, the organization asked for 8 billion USD to assist the 13 million Syrians in need. Recently, the UNHCR called for 4.4 billion USD to provide support for the millions of displaced people in neighboring countries.

### Turkey

Turkey, as aforementioned, is incredibly active in the situation in Syria. Relations between the two nations are tense due to Syria's support of Kurdish movements. Turkey has also taken the brunt of the damage caused by the Syrian refugee crisis, seeing that the nation shares the largest border with Syria. In 2011 Turkey condemned President Bashar al-Assad's violent reaction towards the pro-democratic protests in Syria. The two nations have conducted military operations against one another. A major point during this conflict arose in October 2012 when Turkey attacked Syrian troops. This attack came as retaliation against Syrian mortar bombings. The conflict between the two nations has not ceased, as on February 11th of 2020 the Turkish Armed Forces shot a Syrian helicopter, resulting in the death of the entire crew. Following the development of Turkish involvement in the region will be integral in formulating solutions for this issue.

### Israel

It is important to understand that Syria, like many Arab nations in the region, has not recognized Israel as a sovereign state. Relations between Israel and Syria are incredibly rocky, and the two nations have conducted military operations against each other. In 1967, Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon fought against Israel in what is referred to as the Six-Day War. Since then, several nations have helped broker peace and establish peace agreements between the two nations, including the formation of the Israeli-Syrian ceasefire line. This line, however, has experienced conflict during the Syrian Civil War. Despite this, Israel has provided Syrians near their border with humanitarian aid.

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
March 2011	The first major protests erupt in Dar'ā (southern Syria) as violent conflict sprouts in with numerous protesters killed. The regime's response to the protest was

violent and fueled the protesters' cause which causes similar protests to emerge around Syria. Armed security forces were filmed beating and firing at peaceful protesters.

October 4th, 2011	Russia & China veto a UNSC resolution that calls for a halt on the crackdown in Syria against Assad's enemies.
August 18th, 2013	UN weapons inspectors investigate the use of chemical weapons as Doctors Without Borders announces 3 hospitals treated patients suffering "neurotoxic symptoms."
June 3rd, 2014	Assad is re-elected in the first election since the civil war broke out.
September 23rd-25th, 2016	200 airstrikes hit Aleppo.
December 13th, 2016	The government takes control of most of the areas controlled by rebel groups whilst Turkey and Russia try to implement a ceasefire for civilians to evacuate, which collapses less than a day after it is implemented.
October 26th, 2017	A joint report from UN & international chemical weapons inspectors finds the Assad regime to be guilty of the April sarin attack which killed 80 people.
February 27th, 2018	President Putin orders a 5-hour humanitarian pause but when it begins, activists report shelling & artillery fire from pro-regime groups.
April 14th, 2018	US, France, & UK launch airstrikes on Syria - as a response to chemical weapons attack in Eastern Ghouta.
October 9th, 2019	US withdraws troops, allowing Turkish troops to drive away US allies, the Kurds.

## Relevant UN Resolutions and Treaties

- UN SC Resolution 2235, 7 August 2015 (**S/RES/2235**)
- UN SC Resolution 2209, 6 March 2015 (**S/RES/2209**)
- UN SC Resolution 2165, 14 July 2014 (**S/RES/2165**)
- UN SC Resolution 2401, 24 February 2018 (**S/RES/2401**)
- UN SC Resolution 2393, 19 December 2017 (**S/RES/2393**)
- UN SC Resolution 2336, 31 December 2016 (**S/RES/2336**)
- UN SC Resolution 2178, 24 September 2014 (**S/RES/2178**)
- UN SC Resolution 2118, 27 September 2013 (**S/RES/2118**)



## Possible Solutions

**Humanitarian Intervention can put an end to human rights violations and assist both internally and externally displaced persons.** This can extend to open borders as a possibility however it is crucial to remember the economic and safety threats they may impose on neighboring nations as there is no way to regulate the threat of terrorism, undocumented work, and smuggling of goods. Moreover, this is an idealistic goal because group-directed assistance is currently given to Syrian refugees and displaced persons and yet there is always going to be more than can be done.

**Another solution is persuading all parties to establish a cease-fire with a guarantee that no one will engage in violent attacks before it has ended,** which would be a complex process as the Syrian regime has often violated cease-fire agreements. Following the examples set by previous Security Council resolutions, calling upon all parties to stop fighting and begin peace talks will allow the situation to improve. Additionally addressing the human rights violations in War is necessary.

**Putting an end to the export of arms to the Syrian government and removing chemical weapons could be more effective if cooperating with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.** Although the government agreed to remove and destroy their chemical sarin and chlorine weapons, it has not stopped them from continuing to use them against their citizens; hence finding a more effective manner for the international community to get a hold of these weapons and destroy them is vital to this conflict.

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