**United States Relations with Syria**

Author: Phillip Kadaev Bronx High School of Science, NY

The Syrian Civil War has ravaged the nation for over four years leaving the nation in political turmoil. The death toll of the conflict has eclipsed two hundred thousand, with over ten thousand child casualties.[[1]](#footnote-1) Large terrorist organizations including Al-Qaeda and ISIS have flourished in the region throughout the course of the war, and the United States has conducted air strikes on terrorist strongholds in the nation. The United States also suspended diplomatic relations with President Bashar al-Assad’s government in March of 2014. Although United States and Syrian relations have come to light with the outbreak of the civil war, both nations have maintained complex diplomatic relations that spanned over the course of seventy years. The current instability in Syria is in part dependent on earlier American involvement in Syria, which ultimately destabilized the nation and promoted anti-American sentiment.

After twenty-three years under the French mandate system, Syria obtained independence in 1943 and in 1944 the United States established diplomatic relations with the new nation. The United States and Syria had relatively cordial relations for several years, but it was unsatisfied with Syria’s lack of democratic representation and thus supported a military coup d’état to overthrow the government. Although the coup was successful in placing pro-American Husni Zaim in power, several coups shortly followed and ended with yet another military coup that was more sympathetic to communism than Zaim’s government. With the cooperation of Great Britain the United States conducted Operation Straggle to topple anti-western leaders in Syria, but the plan was disrupted by Egypt’s seizure of the Suez Canal. However, the United States continued its attempt to topple the new Syrian government with Operation Wappen to put pro-American Shishakli in power, but the plan was discovered and foiled by Syrian intelligence.[[2]](#footnote-2) These series of American backed coups destabilized Syria during the early 1950s and it led to the development of anti-American sentiment in the region.

The Arab-Israeli War in 1967 marked the culmination of the deterioration of American and Syrian relations, when a coalition of Egyptian, Jordanian, and Syrian forces fought against Israel forces for their air strike of Egyptian forces near Israel’s border. American and Syrian relations did not normalize until 1974. By this time President Bashar al-Assad’s father, Hafez al-Assad, had assumed total control of Syria in 1971 by overthrowing radical leader Salah Jadid. Hafez al-Assad spoke against pan-Arabism, but he stringently supported Arab protection from Israel. Although American relations with Syria during the 80’s and 90’s were relatively amicable, they quickly deteriorated in the early 2000’s, due to Syria’s inability to prevent the transit of foreign soldiers into Iraq. In addition, Syria’s history of human rights violation and interference in Lebanese affairs further exacerbated tensions between Syria and the United States. However, in 2009 the Obama administration attempted to ameliorate tensions and attempt to reduce regional tensions and foster Middle East peace with Syrian cooperation. Although these attempts appeared promising, the Syrian Civil War began in the March of 2011.

The Syrian Civil War eventually led to the suspension of diplomatic relations with Syria and the removal of Syrian diplomats from the United States.[[3]](#footnote-3) The civil war began in response to the government’s arrest of Syrian students who wrote “Down with the Regime” on various walls in the southern city of Dara'a. The arrest of the students led to a large movement that called for freedom of speech and an overthrow of President Assad.[[4]](#footnote-4) The war has raged on for over four years and claimed the lives of over 200,000 people and it has displaced over 9 million Syrian residents. In response to the growing crisis and reports of the Syrian government’s use of inhumane tactics, use of chemical weapons and human rights violations, the United States called for all Syrian diplomats to leave the United States and it suspended all relations with the Syrian government and instead as called for Assad’s resignation. The United States government has provided nonlethal aid as well as weapon shipments to Syrian rebels to fight against Assad’s forces and it has conducted air raids on ISIS and Al Qaeda strongholds in Syria.[[5]](#footnote-5)

One of the largest problems the United States faces in Syrian relations currently is that large numbers of terrorist volunteers have joined the rebel ranks and thus there is great difficulty in ensuring that weapon shipments reach non-radical rebels and does not fall into the hands of jihadists. The United States has claimed that it is only sending aid to non-radical forces, but this claim is ultimately quixotic and unrealistic. With the massive influx of terrorist fighters into the Syrian Civil War it has become virtually impossible to regulate, which type of soldiers are receiving aid. Therefore, American military aid to the region is essentially fueling the fighting. There is no simple solution to ending the Syrian Civil War; it is a highly convoluted war with various factions that include both progressive and extremist groups that fight on each side. This war began with a purpose to topple Assad’s oppressive regime, but a large part of it has now become a fight for power between Assad’s government, progressive rebels and Islamic extremists.

The stabilization of Syria is essential to the establishment of lasting peace within the Middle East. The Syrian war has acted as a catalyst for the growth of ISIS and other terrorist organizations in the Middle East and the war has affected the economies and security of neighboring countries such as Lebanon. Therefore, the stabilization of Syria is crucial for the stabilization of the Middle East itself. Unfortunately, the end of the Syrian Civil War does not appear to be near and there is no single solution to ending the war quickly. Currently, the United States continues to send nonlethal aid and arms to Syrian rebels and the Obama administration has pledged to send 500 million dollars in aid to Syrian insurgents.[[6]](#footnote-6) Although humanitarian aid should be provided to Syrian civilians, weapon shipments should be halted, because the influx of weapons into the nation will not expedite the conclusion of the war, instead it will fuel the growing violence. The proliferation of terrorist organizations in Syria, pose a large threat to not only Middle Eastern security, but to global security, and thus airstrikes on terrorist strongholds must be continued. Although airstrikes are not an ideal method for fighting these terrorist organizations, they are one of the few effective ways of attempting to weaken these organizations without having to send American troops. In addition, the United States must closely work with Syria’s neighbors to limit the amount of weapons that enter the country and to prevent the movement of terrorist groups and foreign mercenaries in and out of the country. As stated earlier, this civil war is a highly complex war that has no single or correct solution and thus it is incredibly difficult to decide the appropriate course action for ending the war. American action in Syria is essential in ending the war, because the unfortunate reality is that American backed coup’s in the nation in the 1950s and other Middle Eastern nations did play a role in the development of this instability that plagues Syria and neighboring countries.

The Syrian Civil War has ravaged the entire nation of Syria and it has destabilized the Middle East, and thus the United States policy of dealing with this conflict is essential in preserving global security and ending the war. The civil war has fostered the growth of several terrorist organizations in the region including ISIS and Al Qaeda, who threaten the security of the United States. The war has also displaced nearly 9 million Syrian civilians and it has become a large humanitarian crisis.[[7]](#footnote-7) The war is highly complex and there is no single solution to quickly end it, but it is in the United States’ interest for this war to end quickly and with minimal bloodshed. There is no clear or entirely correct approach to dealing with the Syrian Civil War, but the United States and other nations must continue to provide humanitarian aid and attempt to weaken the terrorist organizations in the nation. The United States must suspend its shipment of weapons to Syria, and instead adopt a policy of preventing weapons and foreign fighters from entering the country as a means to expedite the end of the war and qualify the death toll.

1. Al-Khalidi, Suleiman. "Syria Death Toll Now Exceeds 210,000: Rights Group." *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters, 07 Feb. 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Little, Douglas. "1949-1958, Syria: Early Experiments in Covert Action." 1.51 (2003) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Gordon, Michael R. "U.S. Orders Syrian Embassy and Consulates to Suspend Operations." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 18 Mar. 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. "U.S. Relations With Syria." *U.S. Department of State*. U.S. Department of State, 20 Mar. 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Chivers, C. J., and Eric Schmitt. "Arms Airlift to Syria Rebels Expands, With Aid From C.I.A." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 24 Mar. 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Barnes, Julian. "Obama Proposes $500 Million to Aid Syrian Rebels." *WSJ*. The Wall Street Journal. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Goldberg, Eleanor. "Aid Group Pressures U.S. To Resettle 65,000 Syrian Refugees By End Of Next Year." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 9 Apr. 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)