

HIGH LEVEL PANEL



AGENDA – Deliberation on the Resolution of the
Syrian Crisis

Letter from the Executive Board

Greetings Ambassadors,

We welcome you to the United Nations Human Rights Council. We hope that the three days of the conference will be full of intense discussion and deliberation.

We expect every ambassador to represent their country to the best of their abilities, and contribute fruitfully to debate. From each one of you, we expect impeccable diplomatic conduct- which includes diplomatic courtesy, effective lobbying and above all, healthy participation. The following document gives a background on the agenda. The document should not be taken at its face value, and should only be used for giving direction to your research. Moreover, links have been provided to help you during the course of your research.

As delegates, you will be expected to be thorough with your research and base your analysis and conclusions on the same during debate. Please remember, a Council is only as strong as its individual ambassadors, and that the Executive Board is here merely to guide debate, not to take part in it.

We expect the three days to be an immense learning experience. Please feel free to revert to the Executive Board, for any queries you may have.

Best Regards,

Gatik Yadav
Chairperson

Anubha Mathur
Vice Chairperson

Suggestions before you start researching-

A few aspects that delegates should keep in mind while preparing:

Procedure: The purpose of putting in procedural rules in any committee is to ensure a more organised and efficient debate. The Executive Board shall be mildly strict with the Rules of Procedure, although the discussion of the agenda will be the main priority. So, delegates are advised not to restrict their statements due to hesitation regarding the procedure.

Foreign Policy: Following the foreign policy of one's country is the most important aspect of a Model UN Conference. This is what essentially differentiates a Model UN from other debating formats.

Role of the Executive Board: The Executive Board is appointed to facilitate debate. The committee shall decide the direction and flow of debate. The delegates are the ones who constitute the committee and hence must be uninhibited while presenting their opinions/stance on any issue. However, the Executive Board may put forward questions and/or ask for clarifications at all points of time to further debate and test participants.

NATURE OF SOURCES/EVIDENCE This Background Guide is meant solely for research purposes and must not be cited as evidence to

substantiate statements made during the conference. Evidence or proof for substantiating statements made during the formal debate is acceptable from the following sources:

1. United Nations: Documents and findings by the United Nations or any related UN body are held as credible proof to support a claim or argument. **Multilateral Organisations:** Documents from international organisations like OIC, NAFTA, SAARC, BRICS, EU, ASEAN, the International Criminal Court, etc. may also be presented as a credible source of information.

2. Government Reports: These reports can be used in a similar way as the State Operated News Agencies reports and can, in all circumstances, be denied by another country. However, a nuance is that a report that is being denied by a certain country can still be accepted by the Executive Board as a credible piece of information.

3. News Sources:

(a) Reuters: Any Reuters article that clearly makes mention of the factor is in contradiction to the fact being stated by a delegate in council.

(b) State-operated News Agencies: These reports can be used in the support of or against the State that owns the News Agency. These reports, if credible or substantial enough, can be used in support of or against any country as such but in that situation, may be denied by any other country in the council. Some examples are –RIA Novosti⁸ (Russian Federation), Xinhua News Agency¹¹ (People’s Republic of China), etc.

Please Note-

- Reports from NGOs working with UNESCO, UNICEF and other UN bodies will be accepted.

Under no circumstances will sources like Wikipedia, or newspapers like the Guardian, Times of India etc. be accepted. However, notwithstanding the aforementioned criteria for acceptance of sources and evidence, delegates are still free to quote/cite from any source as they deem fit as a part of their statements.

Introduction to the High Level Panel

A High Level Panel is a meeting of experts, stakeholders and international parties that come forth to work on solving a long standing problem through cooperation.

INTRODUCTION

The current conflict in Syria is one the most dynamic and complex items on the United Nations (UN) Security Council's (SC) agenda. It poses a serious threat to regional stability, represents a massive and growing humanitarian crisis, and has proved to be an extremely divisive issue within the Council itself. What began as an example of a peaceful protest in the middle of March 2011, has grown into a full-fledged conflict spreading across the region, costing more than 100,000 lives, forcing over 2 million Syrians to flee their country, and displacing another 4.25 million within Syria itself. Numerous organized fighting forces from Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran have also entered the conflict, further spreading the consequences and complicating the dynamics of this constantly evolving crisis.

The UN plays a crucial role in any conflict threatening international peace and security; thus it is vital to present an overview of the UN's involvement within the crisis thus far – with a particular focus on the SC. Whenever SC Member States address a failed state situation of spiraling violence like Syria, they often divide and conceptualize it in terms of its political, security, and humanitarian factors. In order to facilitate this type of thinking, this topic will also be divided into political, security, and humanitarian sections, beginning with an understanding of the international framework and role of the UN system. The dynamic nature of the Syrian conflict should also

be at the forefront of delegates' minds as they delve into this topic. While the situation as it is presented below is accurate and up to date at the time of writing, it is also constantly changing. Delegates should approach the following topic simply as a primer to be followed up rigorously with current and evolving information.

Background/Significant Events

The situation in Syria started peacefully, as part of the event commonly called "The Arab Spring" in early 2011. People in countries across the Middle East took to the streets to protest the long rule of their leaders. These protestors called for greater rights and more freedom. In some countries, like Tunisia and Egypt, the rulers were overthrown without much violence. In Libya, the dictator Muammar Qaddafi was removed from power by a combination of rebel forces and attacks from a group of states backed by the UN Security Council;

1. Protests in Syria were met with the government increasing crackdowns on freedoms. These crackdowns eventually became full-on attacks on civilians, including the shelling and bombing of cities.
2. President Bashar al-Assad has faced a growing pressure from the international community to end his oppression, but the violence continues. It is said there is widespread torture being carried out in state prisons. The people of Syria are also very diverse, making efforts to end the violence difficult. Syria has many religions. Most Syrians are Muslims who practice the Shiite branch of Islam, with

minority Sunni, Druze, and Christian communities. President Assad is the member of a branch of Islam, called Alawites, different from most of Syria. President Assad has claimed that if he is forced out of office, factions within Syria will be more likely to fight among themselves for control of the country.

3. Making matters more complicated is the fact that members of the opposition have begun fighting back against the government. The Free Syrian Army is made up of soldiers who deserted from the Syrian Army, civilians wanting to fight the Assad government, and foreign elements who may not have Syria's best interests at heart. The exact make-up of the FSA is unknown, but they have been increasing their attacks against government officials and the Syrian Army. The demands of either side are hard to bring together. The Syrian government wants all rebels to surrender themselves to prison and for all protests against the government to stop. The rebels want President Assad to step down from power and let free elections happen in Syria.

Another issue that has taken up Centre stage on a global platform is the existence of chemical weapons in Syria and how it poses a strategic threat in the Middle East. Larger countries such as Russia and USA have now been trying to work out a way in which these weapons can be disbanded and a peaceful compromise can be reached within the country, whereby there are no casualties and each side gets what they want. For the 100,000 people who have left Syria, and the 1.5 million who remain inside of Syria but have left their homes, the ongoing

crisis impacts every part of their lives and its continued existence is debilitating to their very spirit. Reports coming out of Syria have hundreds of civilians dying every day. Should the international community fail to act, Syria will be continuing a long and bloody civil war. The entire Middle East region will feel the results of such inaction.

Past International Action

After over a year of debate, the Security Council passed Resolution 2042 and Resolution 2043 in April 2012. These resolutions approved former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's role as Joint Special Envoy, a lead negotiator that worked for both the United Nations and the League of Arab States. Annan came up with six points known as the Annan Plan that would have President Assad leave power and would provide a process to find a new leader of Syria. To support the Annan Plan and the ceasefire Assad agreed to under it, the Security Council created the UN Supervisory Mission in Syria (UNSMIS). UNSMIS was to watch over the ceasefire and report any violence to the Council. Over three hundred observers were sent to Syria; however, the ceasefire lasted less than a week. Syria defends its recent attacks as being necessary to prevent terrorism from being carried out by the FSA. The Free Syrian Army insists that they must attack the Syrian government to prevent more attacks on civilians. Neither side has listened to UN Security Council resolutions or the Annan Plan. UNSMIS was pulled out of Syria on August 19, 2012. The UN Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly have also discussed the situation in Syria and passed resolutions calling for the violence to end. Neither of these bodies have the power of the Security Council to force changes. However, the

UN Human Rights Council has published several reports with regard to the situation in Syria and the latest report is not painting UNHCR. These reports can be used as references by the Security Council when taking decisions with respect to Syria. In addition, the United Nations has had several agencies on the ground to help end the humanitarian crisis in Syria, like UNICEF and the World Health Organization. These programs are housing over one hundred thousand people in neighboring countries and providing medicine and food to people who have fled their homes inside of Syria. These programs are sadly underfunded, and their efforts are being harmed by ongoing bombings and shootings. However, the humanitarian crisis also needs to be sorted out as it is getting more and more out of hand. The number of stranded and starved are over 250,000 and the number will only increase if a viable solution is not found.

However, as the conflict has dragged on and violence has increased, the Security Council has successfully passed more resolutions concerning the conflict, most notably S/RES/2258 in December 2015 and S/RES/2268 in February 2016.

S/RES/2258, which was adopted unanimously, was the first resolution focused exclusively on a political solution to the Syrian conflict, and it called for a Syrian-led political process to be facilitated by the UN. S/RES/2268 was adopted amidst the continuous failures of the Geneva peace talks, and the resolution endorsed the cessation of hostilities and called for the resumption of political talks. The UN General Assembly (GA) has also passed several resolutions on the issue. In early 2013, the GA adopted the resolution "The Situation in the Syrian Arab Republic," which condemned the violence and human rights abuses committed by both sides of the fighting

and urged Syria to allow humanitarian aid and independent observers into the state to distribute aid, evaluate the situation for human rights abuses, and investigate the alleged use of chemical weapons against civilians. According to Syria and Russia, this resolution gave unbalanced support to the opposition forces in Syria and empowered terrorist organizations within the country. China also opposed the resolution, arguing that it was in violation of the UN Charter because it interfered unnecessarily in the internal affairs of the UN News Centre. By contrast, the US and members of the Arab League extolled the document as emblematic of the international community's desire to bring peace to Syria. The 2015 session saw the passage of six resolutions pertaining to Syria. A/RES/70/234 focused on the human rights situation in the country, strongly condemning the armed violence by Syrian authorities against its own people and demanding an immediate end to all indiscriminate attacks in public spaces. Four of the six focused on the Israeli-occupied Syrian Golan, and one on the financing of the UN Supervision Mission in Syria.

The Opposition Groups

One of the rebel groups is the Syrian National Council (SNC), which is supported by Turkey. The SNC is opposed to a military intervention but nevertheless is calling for international support to protect Syrian citizens. The National Co-ordination Committee (NCC), a left leaning group, is strongly opposed to any kind of military intervention. Instead they are calling for further sanctions and stronger diplomatic pressure on the Assad regime. They are the only opposition group that agrees to have a dialog with the government under certain conditions.

The Free Syrian Army was formed in August 2011 by army deserters based in Turkey and led by Riyad al- Asaad, a former air force colonel. Col. Asaad claims to have as many as 40,000 men under his command. However, analysts believe there may be no more than 10,000. They are also still poorly armed, and many have only basic military training. Nevertheless, a growing number of defections, partly caused by sectarian division, is weakening the military, strengthening the FSA and increasing the violence. Most soldiers within the FSA are Sunni, while Assad is Alawite, who are closely connected with the (Iranian) Shiites. The wide variety of political groups in Syria - exiled dissidents, grassroots activists and armed militants - have been unable to agree on various issues, starting from, for instance, how to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad. The rebels continued to fight against the Syrian army, who is a lot better equipped and has much more soldiers to defend their positions. The Syrian resistance remains highly fractured both politically and militarily. However, in November 2012, several opposition factions came together to form an umbrella group known as the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. The alliance, formed after months of division among competing groups, opened the door to greater foreign financing and military aid. The group, which replaced the troubled Syrian National Council, is committed to several principles including national sovereignty and independence, unity of country and people, ousting the Assad regime, and civil and democratic society. The coalition has been recognized by more than 100 nations, including most world powers, with the exception of Russia and China. The coalition took the Assad regime's seat at the Arab League summit in Dubai and opened its first embassy in Qatar in March 2013.

Syria & it's allies in the region:

Bashar al-Assad is supported by two important actors in the Middle East: Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah. Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah stated: "Syria has real friends in the region and the world that will not let Syria fall in the hands of America, Israel or Takfiri groups." Hezbollah fighters have been engaged in Syria helping the government from early on in the 25- month uprising. While initially their presence had been officially denied by the Syrian Government, it has become by now more openly as well as large-scale. Funerals of killed Hezbollah fighters are now a regular occurrence in Lebanon. Iran is often called Syria's closest ally. Tehran's ties with Damascus have historically been based on shared strategic interests, including thwarting U.S. and Israeli power in the Middle East. Both countries have also relied on each other to balance their relation to other Arab states. The Syrian Iranian alliance has largely lacked an ideological or religious dimension. The Syrian regime is dominated by members of the Alawites, which is distantly related to the Shi'a religion, which is dominant in Iran.

International Reactions

United States

Under the Obama Administration the United States have been calling for Assad's resignation since August 2011 and have pressed the United Nations Security Council to condemn the Syrian government. They also have recognized the National Coalition of Revolution and Opposition Forces (SOC) as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people and provide

nonlethal assistance to the Coalition and an affiliated Supreme Military Command Council (SMC). Furthermore, the US provides humanitarian aid to international organizations supporting Syrian civilians and nonlethal support to unarmed and armed elements of the Syrian opposition. The Obama Administration believes that a negotiated political settlement is required and has prepared military plans to secure Syria's stockpiles of chemical weapons, if necessary. In May 2013 Obama reiterated his objective as to continue the efforts to increase pressure on the Assad regime, to provide humanitarian aid, to strengthen the moderate opposition and to prepare for a democratic Syria without Bashar al-Assad. Fawaz Gerges, director of the Middle East Centre at the London School of Economics, recently explained that "the United States is operating on two levels - the first level is to basically try to see whether America and Russia can reach a political settlement ... to ease Assad out of power as opposed to a frontal attack, as has been the case, to remove Assad by force. We should make no mistake about the second level on which the American government is operating - that is to keep up the pressure on the Assad government, to increase its support for the armed opposition and the political opposition."

Russia

Russia, as a close ally of the Syrian regime under President Bashar al- Assad remains refusing to sanction tougher action against Damascus by using its veto powers on the UN Security Council. Despite the international condemnation of the Syrian regime, Russian President Vladimir Putin has so far displayed no sign that Moscow is preparing to abandon its ally. In May 2013, John Kerry, US secretary of state, and Putin agreed to

establish an American-Russia peace conference. In the same month Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, said that Russia was completing its delivery of surface-to-air missiles to Syria. However, he emphasized that “Russia is not planning to sell, Russia has sold a long time ago, and is completing supplies of the equipment - which is anti-aircraft systems, according to the already signed contracts”. Lavrov said earlier that Moscow did not plan to sell its advanced S-300 air defense system to Syria but left open the possibility that it could ship such systems to Damascus under an existing contract. Moscow has long been accused of propping up Assad and supplying Damascus with military hardware. Russia is said to oppose a draft resolution, which on Wednesday, May 15, 2013, the UN General Assembly is about to vote on. The draft resolution includes condemning Syrian authorities and accepting the opposition Syrian National Coalition as a party to a potential transition.

United Kingdom

Together with the US the UK wants to increase the pressure on Syrian President Bashar Al Assad. After a recent meeting with President Obama, the British Prime Minister David Cameron said that he ruled out tougher action in Syria but pledged to double non-lethal aid to the Syrian opposition. Cameron also declared that he fully backed the outcome of a meeting between the top US and Russian diplomats this week who agreed to make a joint effort in search of a solution. According to Cameron the UK's ultimate aim is that of halting the bloodshed, allowing the Syrian people to elect a government and preventing a growth in extremism.

People's Republic of China

China, which along with Russia, has vetoed three UN Security Council resolutions criticizing Assad's government, strongly condemns the ongoing violence in Syria. However, China warns against foreign action in Syria and says that the abandonment of Mr. Kofi Annan's six-point peace plan (see below) could plunge the country "into the abyss of full-scale war". In a recent statement China's foreign ministry emphasized once more that China opposes the use of military force and believes any country's sovereignty should be respected. Also, China wants to maintain restraint and avoid any actions that would escalate tensions.

France

France has with Britain sought to lead European diplomacy on Syria, notably with proposals to drop an existing EU arms embargo on the country to allow arms supplies to the rebels. Its priority is to find a political solution to the Syrian crisis and wants to prevent Bashar al-Assad from remaining in power. This involves establishing a transitional government with full executive powers, formed on the basis of mutual consent. France also welcomes the outcome of the meeting between U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian President Vladimir Putin, in order to make progress toward a process aimed at achieving a negotiated settlement of the Syrian crisis.

European Union

The EU member states have been criticized for their passivity in the face of the Syrian Civil War. They only began to wake up to the magnitude of the crisis after they realized they have 8 a large-scale refugee problem on their hands, despite Syria being

one of EU's close partners under the European Neighborhood Policy framework. The crisis certainly exposed political divisions among European governments, which haven't been able to reconcile their positions on how to tackle the conflict. This, in turn, has precluded the launching of peacemaking and crisis management missions under the framework of the Common Security and Defense Policy and the use of European battle groups. Having said that, the EU has provided the most humanitarian aid to Syrian citizens: so far more than €4.2billion for relief and recovery assistance to Syrians in their country and to refugees and their host communities in neighboring Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey and Egypt. It is in the EU's best interest to resolve the Syrian conflict as soon as possible.

Arab League

The Arab League played the role of the mediator between the Syrian government and the opposition at the beginning of the conflict and was close to securing a peace deal. However, the deal never went through and Arab League members decided to suspend Syria's membership in the regional organization. The Arab League has also imposed economic sanctions on Syria, including an asset freeze and an embargo on investments.

Turkey

The Turkish government has been a staunch critic of Mr. Assad since the start of the uprising in Syria. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said it was impossible for Syrians to "accept a dictator who has led to the deaths of up to 350,000 people". Turkey is a key supporter of the Syrian opposition and has faced the burden of hosting almost two million refugees. But its

policy of allowing rebel fighters, arms shipments and refugees to pass through its territory has been exploited by foreign jihadists wanting to join IS. Turkey agreed to let the US-led coalition against IS to use its air bases for strikes on Syria after an IS bomb attack in July 2015. They have though been critical of coalition support for the Syrian Kurdish Popular Protection Units (YPG) - an affiliate of the banned Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) deemed a terrorist group by Turkey, the EU and the US.

Saudi Arabia

The Sunni-ruled Gulf kingdom says 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. Riyadh is a major provider of military and financial assistance to several rebel groups, including those with Islamist ideologies, and has called for a no-fly zone to be imposed to protect civilians from bombardment by Syrian government forces. Saudi leaders were angered by the Obama administration's decision not to intervene militarily in Syria after a 2013 chemical attack blamed on Mr. Assad's forces. They later agreed to take part in the US led coalition air campaign against IS, concerned by the group's advances and its popularity among a minority of Saudis.

Iran

Regional Shia power Iran is believed to be spending billions of dollars a year to prop up President Assad and his Alawite-dominated government, providing military advisers and subsidized weapons, as well as lines of credit and oil transfers. Mr. Assad is Iran's closest Arab ally and Syria is the main

transit point for Iranian weapons shipments to the Lebanese Shia Islamist movement, Hezbollah. Iran is also believed to have been influential in Hezbollah's decision to send fighters to western Syria to assist pro-Assad forces. Militiamen from Iran and Iraq who say they are protecting Shia holy sites are also fighting alongside Syrian troops. Iran has proposed a peaceful transition in Syria that would culminate in free, multi-party elections. It was involved in peace talks over Syria's future for the first time when world powers met in Vienna.

UN Resolutions & failed Resolutions

An overview of the most recent UN Security Council resolutions can be found in Appendix A below. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned again that all three attempts to pass a strong resolution which could have led to sanctions against Syria were vetoed by the Chinese and the Russian delegations in the Security Council. This happened on the 4 October 2011, 4 February 2012 and on the 19 July 2012.

Overview & Timeline of Key Events

Nationwide uprising 2011 March - Security forces shoot dead protestors in southern city of Deraa demanding release of political prisoners, triggering violent unrest that steadily spread nationwide over the following months. President Assad announces conciliatory measures, releasing dozens of political prisoners, dismissing government, lifting 48-year-old state of emergency.

2011 May - Army tanks enter Deraa, Banyas, Homs and suburbs of Damascus in an effort to crush anti-regime protests. US and European Union tighten sanctions. President Assad announces amnesty for political prisoners. 2011 June - The government says that 120 members of the security forces have been killed by "armed gangs" in the north-western town of Jisr al-Shughour. Troops besiege the town and more than 10,000 people flee to Turkey. President Assad pledges to start a "national dialogue" on reform.

2011 June - The IAEA nuclear watchdog decides to report Syria to the UN Security Council over its alleged covert nuclear program. The structure housing the alleged reactor was destroyed in an Israeli air raid in 2007. Opposition organizes 2011 July - President Assad sacks the governor of the northern province of Hama after mass demonstration there, eventually sending in troops to restore order at the cost of scores of lives.

2011 October - New Syrian National Council says it has forged a common front of internal and exiled opposition activists. 2011 November - Arab League votes to suspend Syria, accusing it of failing to implement an Arab peace plan, and imposes sanctions.

2011 December - Twin suicide bombs outside security buildings in Damascus kill 44, the first in a series of large blasts in the capital that continue into the following summer.

2012 February - Government steps up the bombardment of Homs and other cities. 3 International pressure 2012 March - UN Security Council endorses non-binding peace plan drafted by UN envoy Kofi Annan. China and Russia agree to support the plan after an earlier, tougher draft is modified.

2012 May - France, UK, Germany, Italy, Spain, Canada and Australia expel senior Syrian diplomats in protest at killing of more than a hundred civilians in Houla, near Homs.

2012 June - Turkey changes rules of engagement after Syria shoots down a Turkish plane, declaring that if Syrian troops approach Turkey's borders they will be seen as a military threat.

2012 July - Free Syria Army blows up three security chiefs in Damascus and seizes Aleppo in the north.

2012 August - Prime Minister Riad Hijab defects, US President Obama warns that use of chemical weapons would tilt the US towards intervention.

2012 October - Syria-Turkish tension rises when Syrian mortar fire on a Turkish border town kills five civilians. Turkey returns fire and intercepts a Syrian plane allegedly carrying arms from Russia. Fire in Aleppo destroys much of the historic market as fighting and bomb attacks continue in various cities.

2012 November - National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces formed in Qatar, excludes Islamist militias. Arab League stops short of full recognition. Israeli military fire on Syrian artillery units after several months of occasional shelling from Syrian positions across the Golan Heights, the first such return of fire since the Yom Kippur War of 1973.

2012 December - US, Britain, France, Turkey and Gulf states formally recognize opposition National Coalition as "legitimate representative" of Syrian people.

2013 January - Syria accuses Israeli jets of attacking a military research centre near Damascus, but denies reports that lorries carrying weapons bound for Lebanon were hit. Unverified reports say Israel had targeted an Iranian commander charged with moving weapons of mass destruction to Lebanon. International donors pledge more than \$1.5bn (£950m) to help civilians affected by the conflict in Syria.

2013 March - Syrian warplanes bomb the northern city of Raqqa after rebels seize control. US and Britain pledge non-military aid to rebels.

Rise of Islamists 2013 June - Government and allied Lebanese Hezbollah forces recapture strategically important town of Qusair between Homs and Lebanese border. Rebel commanders complain that arms supplies taper off over international concerns about Islamists in the opposition camp.

2013 July - Saudi-backed Ahmed Jarba becomes leader of opposition National Coalition, defeating Qatar-backed rival.

2013 September - UN weapons inspectors conclude that chemical weapons were used in an attack on the Ghouta area of Damascus in August that killed about 300 people, but do not explicitly allocate responsibility for the attack.

2013 October - President Assad allows international inspectors to begin destroying Syria's chemical weapons on the basis of a US-Russian agreement.

2013 December - US and Britain suspend "non-lethal" support for rebels in northern Syria after reports Islamist rebels seize some bases of Western-backed Free Syrian Army.

2014 January-February - UN-brokered peace talks in Geneva fail, largely because Syrian authorities refuse to discuss a transitional government.

2014 March - Syrian Army and Hezbollah forces recapture Yabroud, the last rebel stronghold near the Lebanese border.

2014 May - Hundreds of rebels are evacuated from their last stronghold in the central city of Homs. The withdrawal marks the end of three years of resistance in the city.

2014 June - UN announces removal of Syria's chemical weapons material complete. 'Caliphate' in east Islamic State of Iraq and Syria militants declare "caliphate" in territory from Aleppo to eastern Iraqi province of Diyala.

2014 August - Tabqa airbase, near the northern city of Raqqa, falls to Islamic State militants, who now control entire Raqqa province.

2014 September - United States and five Arab countries launch air strikes against Islamic State around Aleppo and Raqqa.

2015 January - Kurdish forces push Islamic State out of Kobane on Turkish border after four months of fighting.

2015 March - Opposition offensives push back government forces. New Jaish al-Fatah (Army of Conquest) Islamist rebel alliance, backed by Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, captures provincial capital of Idlib. Southern Front alliance of secular and Islamist groups take Jordanian border crossing at Nassib.

2015 May - Islamic State fighters seize the ancient city of Palmyra in central Syria, raising concerns that they might destroy the pre-Islamic World Heritage site. They also capture last border crossing to Iraq. Jaish al-Fatah takes control of Idlib Province, putting pressure on government's coastal stronghold of Latakia.

2015 June - Islamic State and Kurdish fighters intensify fighting between Raqqa and Turkish border. Kurds take Ain Issa and border town of Tal Abyad, Islamic State attacks Kobane and seizes part of Hassakeh, the main city in north-eastern Syria.

2015 September - Russia carries out first air strikes in Syria, saying it targets the Islamic State group. But West and Syrian opposition say it overwhelmingly targets anti-Assad rebels instead.

February 28, 2017 - Russia and China veto a UN Security Council resolution calling for sanctions against the Syria government in response to its use of chemical weapons. April 4, 2017: 58 people killed in a nerve-gas attack, however, victims show telltale signs of a chemical weapons attack. Witnesses claim the attack was carried out by Russian or Syrian jets, the allegations are denied by both parties involved.

April 6, 2017 - The US fires a barrage of cruise missiles at the military base and US President Donald Trump, defends the attack, calling it a "vital national security interest of the United States."

May 9, 2017 - Trump approves military plans to arm the Kurdish YPG as part of the effort to retake the Syrian city of Raqqa from IS militants. Washington considers the YPG crucial to defeating the IS in Syria, but Ankara views the group as an

extension of the Kurdish PKK militant group, which is considered a terrorist organization.

July 7, 2017 - Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin agree to a limited ceasefire in three war-torn provinces in southwest Syria. July 9, 2017: The ceasefire takes effect.

July 23, 2017 - Syrian warplanes bomb the suburbs of Damascus, just one day after the military had declared a cessation of hostilities in the area.

January 2018 - Turkey launches an assault on northern Syria to oust Kurdish rebels controlling the area around Afrin. It seizes the town in March.

February 2018 - Government launches a ferocious assault on Eastern Ghouta, the final rebel- held enclave near Damascus.

April 2018 - Claims of a new chemical attack in Eastern Ghouta's main town of Douma prompt the US, Britain and France to carry out a wave of punitive strikes on Syrian targets.

Potential Path to Conflict Resolution

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, called for the following measures to chart a principled and integrated way forward in the Syrian Civil War: First, ending the violence. It is

irresponsible for foreign powers to give continued military support to parties in Syria that are committing atrocities and flagrantly violating fundamental principles of human rights and international law. I have urged the Security Council to impose an arms embargo. The sides will have to sit across from each other again at the negotiating table. How many more people must die before they get there? Second, protecting people. The United Nations continues to manage a huge humanitarian relief effort. But the government continues to impose unconscionable access restrictions; it has removed medical supplies from aid convoys and deliberately starved and collectively punished communities it regards as sympathetic to the opposition. Some rebel groups have acted similarly. Moreover, the international community has provided barely a third of the funding needed for the relief effort. I continue to appeal for an end to the sieges and for unfettered humanitarian access across internal front lines and international borders. Third, starting a serious political process. The warring parties systematically blocked the relentless initiatives of two of the world's leading diplomats, Kofi Annan and Lakhdar Brahimi. The presidential election earlier this month was a further blow and failed to meet even minimal standards for credible voting. I will soon name a new Special Envoy to pursue a political solution and a transition to a new Syria. Regional countries have a special responsibility to help end this war. I welcome recent contacts between Iran and Saudi Arabia and hope that they will build confidence and reverse a destructive competition in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and elsewhere. Syrian civil society groups are making courageous efforts to maintain the fabric of society and keep open channels of solidarity and communication. Fourth, ensuring accountability for serious crimes. Last month, a resolution that aimed to refer the conflict to the International Criminal Court failed to pass the Security Council. I ask those Member States that say no to the

ICC, but say they support accountability in Syria, to come forward with credible alternatives. The Syrian people have a right to justice and action against impunity. Fifth, finishing the destruction of chemical weapons in Syria. The United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons have worked together to destroy or remove from the country all of the declared materials in a once-large arsenal. Many Member States have provided critical resources and support for this challenging task, which was undertaken in an active war zone, and which will now be completed at various destruction facilities outside Syria. While almost all of the killing in Syria is being done with conventional weapons, it has been essential to reinforce the global norm banishing the production and use of chemical weapons. Sixth, addressing the regional dimensions of the conflict, including the extremist threat. Foreign fighters are in action on both sides, increasing the level of violence and exacerbating sectarian hatreds. While we should not blindly accept the Syrian Government demonization of all the opposition as terrorists, neither should we be blinded to the real threat of terrorists in Syria. The world must come together to eliminate funding and other support for Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and al- Sham. The ISIS is also a threat to all communities in Iraq; it is crucial for the region's leaders -- political and religious -- to call for restraint and avoid a spiral of attack and reprisal.

Further Research

Guiding Questions

- What could make the two sides, government and rebel, come together to talk out their differences?
- What are the differences between what happened in Libya and the current crisis in Syria?
- How can the Security Council help the other UN agencies get food and materials to the civilians in Syria?
- How can this committee cut off non-military ISIS operations such as the sale of captured oil and the continued influx of foreign fighters?
- Is a political solution to the Assad conflict viable, or is a full-scale military intervention the only way to create a viable Syrian government?
- Should the Kurdish militias be given support because of their success in combating ISIS or punished for their affiliation to a terrorist Turkish political party?
- How can this committee reduce the conflict's effects on refugees, children and other vulnerable groups?

Source Pointers

- The Annan Plan: The full text of Kofi Annan's Six Point plan to end the crisis in Syria
- UNSMIS: The official website for the UN Mission in Syria
- BBC: Syria: A valuable resource for up to date news on events in Syria.

Questions:

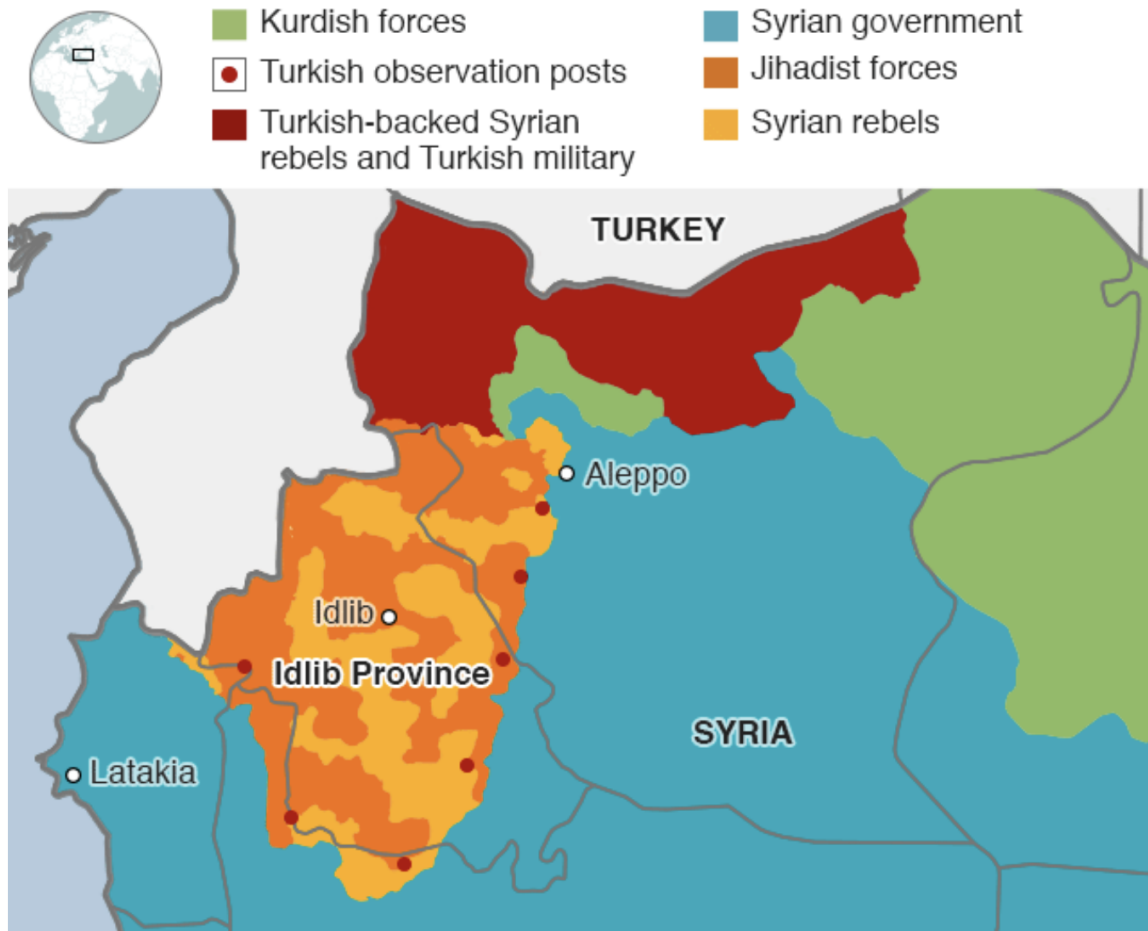
1. What are some of the religious communities which exist within Syria? Which community is President Assad from?
2. Who makes up the Free Syrian Army?
3. Which foreign groups support President Assad, and which would like to see him removed from office?
4. Who was named by the Security Council as the Joint Special Envoy for this crisis?
5. Which countries have vetoed resolution in the Security Council regarding the conflict in Syria, and Why did they do this?

Answers:

1. Some of the religious communities within Syria are Shiite and Sunni Muslims, Druze and Christians. President Assad comes from the Alawite community.
2. The Free Syrian Army is made up of soldiers who deserted from the Syrian Army, civilians wanting to fight the Assad government, and foreigners.
3. Groups which support President Assad include Iran, the Lebanese Hezbollah, Russia, and some Russian allies. Groups which support the rebels include NATO countries (including the US, UK, France, etc.), Turkey, and the Arab League.
4. Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan was named Joint Special Envoy.
5. Russia and China have vetoed resolutions in the Security Council because they do not want Western countries to bomb Syria like they did in Libya.

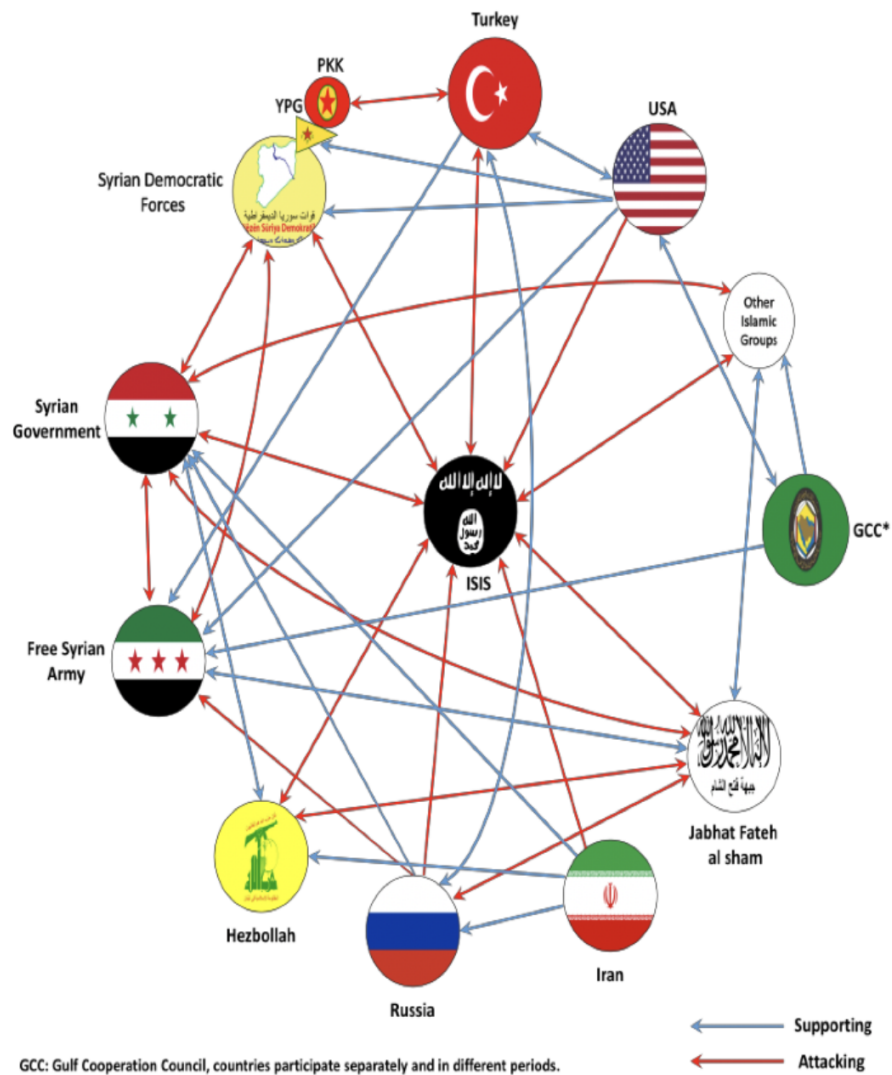
Some Illustrations to consider

Idlib province



Source: IHS Control Monitor, 7 May 2019

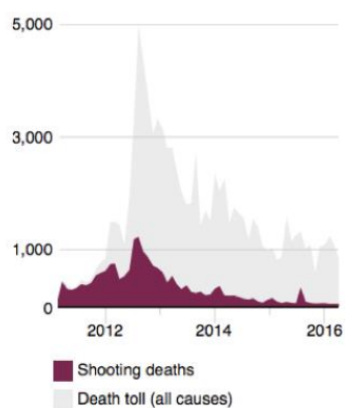
BBC



Causes of violent deaths in Syria, 2011-2016 (March)

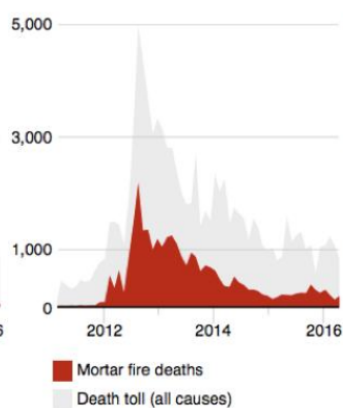
1. Shootings

What began as peaceful protests against the government in March 2011 turned violent after security forces used deadly force against civilians.



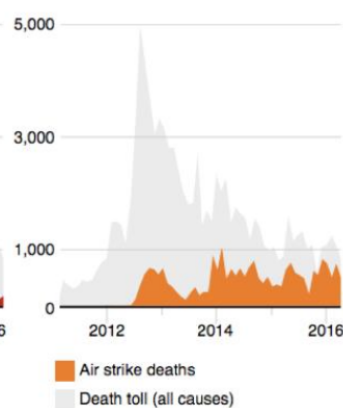
2. Mortar fire

The bloodiest period of the conflict came in 2012, as the killing became more systematic and mortar attacks claimed a higher proportion of lives.



3. Air strikes

Losing ground, the regime began aerial attacks, causing mass casualties. Since Sept 2015, Russian air strikes are also alleged to have killed many civilians.



Source: Violations Documentation Center

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