

STUDY GUIDE

UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL



PEMUN
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United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

TOPIC A: “THE BACKLASH OF THE ARAB SPRING”;

TOPIC B: “THE SITUATION IN SYRIA”

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Letter from the directors to the delegates

Dear Delegates,

We have written this Study Guide very carefully and thoughtfully for you. The matters presented here have captivated us and we expect it does the same for its readers. The purpose of the “UNSC Study Guide” (alongside the Country Guide) is to, not only provide the basic information around topics A and B, but also to instill curiosity and consequently the desire to study more about the subject, as we recommend you do.

Our subjects - the Arab Uprisings and the Syrian situation - are present on the international scenario since 2011 and have been under the media’s attention and the world’s eye ever since. Given the fragility of the social, economic and political situation in the region, the events have been alarming to several countries and have impacted the surrounding peoples.

The dispersion of the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa and the involvement of several international powers in a civil war enlarge the latent pungency of such happenings. The Syrian Civil War has evolved to be the greatest refugee and displacement crisis of our time! This humanitarian situation calls,

not only for attention, but specially for international solutions. And this is why we have endorsed this PEMUN Committee: to generate valuable discussions for achieving, at least in a fictitious reality, an ending to the suffering of thousands.

We thus remind you that this material is a map to your study journey and that you should go beyond its pages. We highly hope you enjoy the PEMUN experience to enrich your knowledge, to improve your rhetoric, the ability to work in groups, the capacity to manage crisis and to make new friends!

Truly,

Directors and Academic Secretariat

1. Glossary

Al-Qaeda - International Islamic fundamentalist organization, made up of independent and collaborative cells aimed at contesting geopolitical power in the Middle East

Alawis - Shia Islam minority that has controlled Syria politically, and militarily, since the 1970s, with the Assad family rise to power. Military leaders and security chiefs are also from this Shiite sect

Arab League - Regional organization formed in 1945 with 22 Member States

Ba'th Party - Syrian political party with Arab nationalist, pan-Arabism and anti-imperialist ideologies

Caliphate - Islamic State, ruled by a single political and religious leader, considered to be the successor to the Islamic prophet Muhammad

Da'esh, also known as ISIL - Acronym in Arabic that often sounds unpleasant to that language. When used by Westerners, is to disrespect the group. France and the United Kingdom have publicly chosen to call the group Da'esh

Draft Resolution - Preliminary version of a resolution, needs to be approved to produce concrete effects

Free Syrian Army or FSA - Rebel armed group formed by defected Syrian officers to fight the Syrian government forces

Hezbollah - Political Lebanon-based organization with paramilitary action based on Islamic Shiite precepts

Jihad – Often translated as “holy war”, it means struggling or striving. It mainly refers to the protection of the faith of Islam using not only diplomatic means, but also legal, economic, political and force (following strict rules of engagement)

Muslim Brotherhood - Sunni Islamist organization

Peacekeeping missions - Mandated by the Security Council to provide security, political and peacebuilding support to countries in conflict or post-conflict situations

Proxy war – Conflict where countries act as instigators, using third parties (proxies) as actors, but do not engage in fights directly

Resolution - Document that stipulates the necessary actions to find a solution to a problem, dispute, or contentious matter

Shari’ah law or Islamic law - The set of principles and conducts that direct the Muslim individuals and their life in society. Its

interpretations and applications vary between the Muslims communities

Shiite/ Shia Islam – Muslims that endorse the literal meaning of the Koran and the Hadith (set of traditions passed by the prophet Muhammad) and are considered extremists within the religion. Are located predominantly in Iran and Iraq, with sizable populations in Syria, Lebanon and Yemen

Sunni Islam – Muslims that have a moderate understanding of the Koran and the Hadith as well as more flexibility towards the application of Shari'ah. In the Middle East, Sunnis make up 90% or more of the populations of Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia

2. List of acronyms

GDP- Gross Domestic Product

ICC - International Criminal Court

ISIL/ISIS - Islamic State of Iran and the Levant or Islamic State of Iran and Syria

JIM - Joint Investigative Mechanism

MENA - Middle East and North Africa

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization

OPCW - Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

SDF - Syrian Democratic Forces

SIF - Syrian Islamic Front

UK - United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

UN - United Nations

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNSC - United Nations Security Council

UNSMIS - United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria

USA - United States of America

USSR - Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

YPG - People's Protection Units

YPJ - Women's Protection Units

3. United Nations Security Council

3.1 The United Nations

“We, the peoples of the United Nations (...)” are the words that initiate one of the most important international treaties of the present days. On the conclusion of the United Nations Conference, the United Nations Charter was signed in July 1945 by 50 countries, plus Poland. It came into force on October 24 of that year, a date celebrated annually as the United Nations Day.

The Organization has today 193 State-members and is composed of six main bodies: The General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice and the Secretariat. Still, the UN is formed by specialized Agencies, Funds, Programs, Commissions, Departments and Bureaus that comprehend all country members.

3.2 The beginning of the UN

The first movements towards the creation of the UN arose while still on the Second World War, with the purpose of preparing the post-war world peace. The Declaration of St. James' Palace, in 1941, asseverated the international intention of working collectively to seek and preserve peace. In the same year, President Franklin Roosevelt of the United States and Prime Minister Winston Churchill of the United Kingdom declared the Atlantic Charter.

On said Charter, the leaders affirmed principles of world order, international justice and economic collaboration that should serve as for a more peaceful future. Although it had little legal validity, the Soviet Union and nine other European governments then signed the Charter. The principles of the

Atlantic Charter inspired the Declaration of The United Nations, which was signed in 1942 by 26 allied countries that had declared war on the Axis Rome- Berlin- Tokyo.

In 1943, on the Moscow and Teheran Conferences, the governments of the United States, Soviet Union, United Kingdom and China got together to an international post-war organization that had as purpose maintaining peace and international security, and that looked beyond the military victory of the Allies.

The Conferences of Dumbarton Oaks and Yalta, of 1944-1945, recognized the need for an international organization that could replace the failed League of Nations. Thus, it began the formulation of the United Nations Charter. The San Francisco Conference gathered delegations of 50 nations, representing eighty percent of the global population, and produced, after much debate and negotiation, the Charter of the United Nations. Signed on June 26 of 1945, the international treaty established the creation of the intergovernmental organization United Nations.

3.3 The UN Charter

The United Nations Charter is composed by 111 articles, divided into 19 chapters, and details, from the principles of the

UN, going through means of action related to threats to peace, up to the jurisdiction of each body.

3.4 The Security Council

Regarding the Security Council, its composition, functions, procedures actions, the UN Charter has devoted Chapters V up to VIII, composed of Articles 23 to 54. The UNSC (United Nations Security Council) is comprised of fifteen Members, of which 5 are permanent -the People's Republic of China, the French Republic, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America- and 10 are non-permanent and elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms.

Every delegation in the Council holds one vote, although those permanent Members have the power to veto any draft resolution. Non-Council members directly affected or concerned in the matter being discussed, may be called to participate in the debate, not holding, however, veto or voting powers. According to the UN Charter, all the Members of the United Nations are subjected to accept and execute the Council's decisions. This makes the Council the only UN body with mandatory force. All other bodies are recommendatory.

The primary objective of the Council is to maintain international peace and security. To accomplish that, the UNSC may call for parties to resolve disputes by means of negotiation, mediation, conciliation, as well as investigate situations of current or rising disputes. The Council may recommend the appropriate procedures, not involving armed force, for such pacific settlements.

It is of the UNSC mission to encourage regional arrangements for local disputes by regional agencies. Should the agreed measures fail to be adequate, “it may take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security”. When force is deemed necessary, the Council is to invite the Member involved in the conflict to participate in the decisions. The action required to execute the UNSC’s decision “shall be taken by all the Members of the United Nations or by some of them, as the Security Council may determine”.

4. TOPIC A: The Backlash of the Arab Spring

4.1 Introduction

In Tunisia, on December 17, 2010, Mohamed set fire to himself to protest officials who did him wrong on the street, as he did not have a license. He was unemployed and worked informally to feed his family. Like several other Tunisians, he was a skilled worker but did not have a job. This self-immolation act was the catalyst to followings movements against dictatorial regimes and in Tunisia and other Arab countries.

Arab citizens from other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) also started to riot against their governments. With the advance of technology, the local media quickly covered those events and spread them around the world, as per example Al-Jazeera. As a cascade effect, the riots got stronger. People were hopeful and surprised with the magnitude of the rallies in those countries ruled by autocratic regimes.

The diffusion of the uprisings was based on internal, as well as regional, political, and socioeconomic contexts. Those nations were saturated with poverty, inequality, and corruption, dealing with decades-long dictatorships. In addition to the rough

conditions of freedom, quality of life and maintenance of basic human rights, the countries were living one of the most intense droughts ever recorded in that region. Citizens were facing high food prices and widespread crop failure. Because of that, it was observed a massive migration to the urban centers, causing destabilization on the already overloaded urban infrastructure. There was a feeling of unrest in the population.

Marc Lynch (2011) called that wave of protests “Arab Spring” and soon the media started to use that expression. The word “spring” refers to the anti-monarchical, democratic and liberal protests that took place in Europe, in 1848. The so-called Spring of Nations was a series of revolts magnified by rapidly-spreading information, which would lead to more uprisings. Although it diffused over 50 countries, they lacked effective political changes, having instead considerable social impact. The term “Arab” designates the twenty countries of the Middle East and North Africa that compose the Arab League. Britain idealized the association of Arab nations in 1942; nevertheless, it only materialized in 1945 (BBC, 2017).

Other Arab countries followed the Tunisian example and the revolts diffused among twelve States. They were unorganized in the same direction, which meant the demands were varied:

some protesters wanted democracy, while others preferred a constitutional monarchy. Although the interests were diverse, they shared a common displeasure against the political and economic condition.

The political situation was very critical. Most of the leaders in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) had been ruling their nations for years. Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali -in the power since 1987- governed Tunisia for 23 years and was the first to be deposed by the Arab Uprisings. The dictator of Libya, Muammar Gaddafi, ruled his country for 42 years. Those leaders' families and friends had privileges that differentiated them from the rest of the population. Patronage was a common practice in a region where the private sector is incipient; knowing someone from the government could guarantee economic advantages, like a job.

Arab states repressed their population –citizens had little political freedom– so to prevent demonstrations of dissatisfaction with the government, they developed a welfare state. Arab people depend a lot on their States. However, with the demographic growth, more people required assistance from the state and it was unable to provide it.

The financial crisis of 2008 involved a crucial part of the

globe. The Arab world also suffered, due to its economy depending on commodities export. The economic scenario in 2011 was still in a bad shape. Consequently, the '08 financial crisis was not the only reason behind that, the region had serious structural issues that inhibited its economical developing. (ANSANI and DANIELLE, 2013).

The productive structure of those countries negatively affects their trade balance: they export commodities that possess little-aggregated value and import manufactured products. Their market is restricted: they only commercialize with some Western countries and there is not a regional market that can narrow the ties between the countries and empower them.

In the dictatorships of the Arab world, the private sector is underdeveloped. The public sector is responsible for generating jobs, but the number of young people has increased, as well as their level of education. The states' bureaucracy is unable to absorb the youth labor force. Consequently, the unemployment rates increased substantially in the period before the Arab Uprisings. Young people had to work on underpaid jobs in agriculture and the informal market to escape from unemployment. Population was very dissatisfied with the economic situation.

4.2 Main Arab Uprising countries

Tunisian Republic

Current President: Mohamed Beji Caid Essebsi

Population: 11.5 million

Area: 164,150 sq km (63,378 sq miles)

Main languages: Arabic (official), French

Main religion: Islam

Life expectancy: 74 years (men), 78 years (women)

Before the Arab Uprising, Tunisia had good rates of education and a vast number of middle-class people when compared to others Arab countries. Political institutions worked relatively well. Ben Ali ruled Tunisia with a technocratic regime. The country and its leader sympathized with Western countries. On the other hand, neither Tunisian citizens nor political parties had freedom of expression. In addition, citizens did not have the same opportunities; patronage was frequent, Ben Ali's family and friends had many economic privileges (ANDERSON, 2011:03).

In 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi, set fire to himself after officials stopped him from selling vegetables in Sidi Bouzid. The self-immolation act in a Tunisian public square was the fuse to the Arab Uprisings. Riots spread in twelve Arab countries.

Young Tunisians took part in demonstrations against the government; they demanded jobs, political freedom, and equal rights. During the protests, the Army did not support Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, who had been ruling Tunisia since 1989. On January 14, 2011, he resigned (MANFREDA, 2017).

A coalition between an Islamist party –Nahda– and secular parties won the parliamentary elections in October 2011. Nevertheless, Salafis -a conservative religious group– and secular citizens disagreed during the drafting of the Tunisian Constitution of 2014. The secular Nida Tounes party won the following parliamentary elections. In December 2014, Mohamed Beji Caid Esseb was elected president. In 2015, Freedom House classified Tunisia as a democratic country; it was the “best score” of the Arab countries (The Economist).

Seifeddine Rezgui -a jihadist 23-year old gunman- opened fire on tourists for the period of 30 minutes on June 26, 2015, in Sousse, a Tunisian beach city. He executed 38 people; 30 of them were British. (GRIERSON, 2017). This episode of terror attack affected the tourism and consequently the economic advance of the country.

Arab Republic of Egypt

Current President: Abdel Fattah al-Sisi

Capital: Cairo

Population: 83.9 million

Area: 1 million sq km (386,874 sq miles)

Main language: Arabic

Main religions: Islam, Christianity

Life expectancy: 72 years (men), 76 years (women)

Egypt was the second country stage the Arab Uprisings. Its leader, Hosni Mubarak was in power for 29 years; his regime was very repressive and corrupt. The economy was damaged, a small elite of business people connected to the leader's family held of the economy, meanwhile, the Egyptians were supposed to pay lots of bribery. The rates of poverty were increasing, and the government was unable to enlarge its welfare system. As in Tunisia, the protests lead to the leader's downfall, but the militaries took a prominent position in the following period (ANDERSON, 2011:04).

The Arab Uprisings did not bring democracy to Egypt. On July 2013, the military deposed Mohamed Morsi – an Islamist president elected on June 30, 2012. Since then, the General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi rules the country with the support of the Judiciary. This autocratic govern suspended the Egyptian Constitution of

2012 and the Parliament. Citizens do not have freedom of expression and they cannot criticize the regime; members of the opposition are arrested and tortured (MANFREDI, 2017).

Not only is the political situation alarming in Egypt, but also the economic one. The economy rates are worse than before the Arab Uprisings as the State is very restrictive in the economic sector. The annual inflation rate on food reached its peak in April 2017, with a record of 43.61%, but as of March 2018, it had fallen to 13.18¹.

Besides the high food price, Egyptians are facing problems such as the lack of water; 28% of Egypt population live in miserable conditions. The rate of the population started growing after the Arab Uprisings due to the State negligence with public health; Muslim Brotherhood's members are getting married younger. (Rivlin, 2018:03; AL-JAZEERA, 2017).

The country receives an extensive amount of foreign investment; it represented 2.3% of Egypt's GDP in 2014-17. Notwithstanding, the money is not invested strategically in the private sector, to make it more productive and generate more jobs, preferring to invest in the public sector and oil industries. Egypt

¹ Data from Trading Economics.

is supposed to get lots of loans to mitigate the economic situation, but as a result of the country's inability to pay it, the debt has become a “snowball” (Rivlin, 2018).

The Egyptian economic balance is negative: only 5% of Egyptians firms export and exportation of goods and services represents 15% of GDP. In addition, tourism used to play a great role on this number, but the post-Arab Uprising Egypt has been driving tourists away due to the worsening of the political situation and the rise of terrorism (Rivlin, 2018).

State of Lybia

Current President: Libya has been beset by instability since the ouster of long-term leader Muammar Gaddafi

Capital: Tripoli

Population 6.4 million

Area 1.77 million sq km (685,524 sq miles)

Major language Arabic

Major religion Islam

Life expectancy 69 years (men), 75 years (women)

Libya is located in North Africa and has been an independent state since 1951. King Idris I ruled the country from its independence until 1969, when Colonel Muammar el-Qaddafi took over the government through a coup (NEW YORK TIMES, 2018).

In Libya, the Armed Forces violently repressed the riots

started on February 15, 2011; it culminated in a civil war. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization intervened in March 2011, and in October 2011, Colonel Qaddafi was killed after 42 years in power (MANFREDA, 2017).

Its government was corrupt and repressive; Libyans did not have access to basic goods – the dictator and his network administered the country's wealth, which is 80% based on petroleum. The State was unable to provide a decent life, and people could only trust their families and tribes. As consequence, the political institutions were very vulnerable; there was neither an active civil society nor an efficient bureaucracy. It resulted in cleavages based on kinship and region (ANDERSON, 2011:05).

Mustafa Abdul Jalil was the president of the interim government, named National Transition Council of Libya (NTC), founded on February 27 of 2011. This group intended to lay the foundation for Libya's reconstruction, however, it could not comply with its promise; it is also a consequence of the economic situation after the Arab Uprisings (EL-GAMATY, 2016).

Libyan citizens showed their dissatisfaction with the NTC when they chose the interim parliament General National Congress (GNC) on the elections of 2012. As well as NTC, GNC was unable to fulfill its promise. Due to violence and politic, the

task of constructing democracy through a new constitution became more difficult (MANFREDA, 2017).

In 2014, a new legislature in Libya assumed the power, but the country was unable to develop a unified government. In December 2015, the UN gathered efforts to unify the Libyan government through a presidential council, the General National Accord (GNA). Besides reconstructing the country, the new unified government was also important to make the country less vulnerable to the ISIS threat (EL-GAMATY, 2016).

Syrian Arab Republic

Current President: Bashar al-Assad

Capital: Damascus

Population: 21.1 million

Area: 185,180 sq km (71,498 sq miles)

Major language: Arabic

Major religion: Islam, Christianity

Life expectancy: 74 years (men), 78 years (women)

Despite showing, in its early history as a Republic, traces of recurring conflicts with neighboring countries, in the years before the Arab Uprisings, Syria began to present strong changes in its foreign relations. With the death of president Hafez al-Assad in June 2000, his son, Bashar al-Assad, took over the power and Syria's government sought to constitute diplomatic

relations with countries like Lebanon, France Iraq, even though no great success was achieved.

Although Syria was demonstrating an external evolution, the reality experienced inside the country was far from ideal, being under the leadership of a government considered one of the least democratic in the world, according to the Global Democracy Ranking². Syria was suffering high unemployment rates, mainly caused by free market and unpopular policies taken by Hafez and enforced by Bashar al-Assad, an annual growth rate of 3.39%, far below most other developing countries. The disinterestedness to solve these problems demonstrated by the State ended up increasing the discontentment of the most affected portion of society - the poor. This has resulted in the increasing of poverty rates in cities as Daraa and Homs.

The human rights situation in Syria has inevitably been the subject of the harsh critiques from global organizations. The inequality of judgment is a problem that has been affecting Syrian citizens for years, even in terms of basics rights such as free expression and association assembly.

² A position of 152 out of 167 countries covered by the Democracy Index of 2010. In 2017, the country's position had fallen to 166, staying close behind North Korea.

Syria is a country known by its non-democratic processes that how the media works, how the citizens are prevented from choosing their representatives and how their demands. All the opposition is controlled by organizations powered by Bashar al-Assad and enforced to deal with human right activists and ethnic minorities in the most violent way, including harassment and torture, besides the non-representation in political affairs.

All these historical conditions generated a discontentment around the country, leading to a series of manifestations in favor of democratic institutions and a better life quality. In Syria, peaceful protests erupted in 2011, inspired by the ones happening in Egypt and Tunisia. The beginning of the protests was due to the detainment and torture of a group of boys, accused of graffitiing walls in support of the Arab Uprisings. The protests spread throughout the country, but the government response was very violent and repressive, unlike the manifests. Led by President Bashar al-Assad, government forces responded to the protests by killing hundreds of people and imprisoning many more.

As time passed by, the uprisings became more often and even more expressive, with independent forces and groups getting powerful and creating attrition with civils and the

government. In July 2011, Syria began to slide into civil war when defectors from the military announced the formation of the Free Syrian Army, a rebel group aiming to overthrow the government.

Republic of Yemen

Current President: Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi

Capital: Sanaa

Population: 27.5 million

Area: 536,869 sq km (207,286 sq miles)

Major language: Arabic

Major religion: Islam

Life expectancy: 63 years (men), 66 years (women)

Yemen is a country that historically has gone through several conflicts involving armed and independent groups, is considered a very unstable territory. Since 2000, with the beginning of Al-Qaeda attacks against the Russians and Americans, Aden has become, as well as the whole country, the epicenter of several bombings and clashes of groups, causing the instability that has reflected directly in citizens' lives and on the economic conditions.

The government, represented since 1990 until 2012 by the President Ali Abdullah Saleh, in addition of being unable to stabilize the country, was dealing with the conflicts in an

extremely violent and repressive way: empowering armies and seeking to suppress any attempt of opposition or rebel groups within the country. Thousands of Yemen's innocent citizens were killed in the middle of this fire exchange, creating inside the country a will for a more democratic and legitimate government.

As a background of all conflicts and democratic issues, Yemen was also dealing with a socioeconomic context that was far from ideal. Being one of the most impoverished countries on East, with a 17.1% unemployment rate and an annual growth reaching -12.8% in 2011³, Yemen was immersed in a massive recession, even in terms of basic popular assistance.

The human rights situation was also a concern since the government had been accused of torture, inhumane treatment, and several executions. There were many arrests of citizens, as well as non-allowed home invasions justified as actions towards the contention of rebel and opposition groups.

Aggregating all that conflicts and problems, and highly inspired by the protests in Tunisia and other neighbors, Yemen burst with expressive uprisings in January 2011. In its initial phase, the protesters were calling for more democratic institutions

³ According to Trading Economics.

and for more favorable conditions than the ones present in the 33-year rule by President Ali Abdullah Saleh. His mandate endured a period marked by excessive clashes, inadequate levels of life quality, elevated levels of corruption and wastes of money in the government. The protesters' demands then escalated to call for the resignation of Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Mass defections from the military, as well as from Saleh's government, effectively rendered much of the country outside of the government's control, and protesters vowed to defy its authority.

4.3 Timeline of the Arab Uprisings

Tunisia: Government overthrown on Jan. 14, 2011. President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali flees into exile. Elections for a Constituent Assembly held on Oct. 23, 2011.

Egypt: Government overthrown on Feb. 11, 2011. President Hosni Mubarak steps down, faces charges of killing unarmed protesters. Elections held on Nov. 28, 2011. Protests continue in Tahrir Square.

Libya: Anti-government protests begin on Feb. 15, 2011, leading to civil war between opposition forces and Muammar Gadhafi loyalists. Tripoli was captured, and the government overthrown on Aug. 23. Gadhafi was killed by transition forces on Oct. 20.

Syria: Protests for political reforms have been ongoing since Jan. 26, 2011 with continuing clashes between the Syrian army and protesters. On one day in July, 136 people were killed when Syrian army tanks stormed several cities.

Yemen: Ongoing protests since Feb. 3, 2011. President Ali Abdullah Saleh is injured in an attack on June 4. On Nov. 23, he signs a power-transfer agreement ending his 33-year reign.

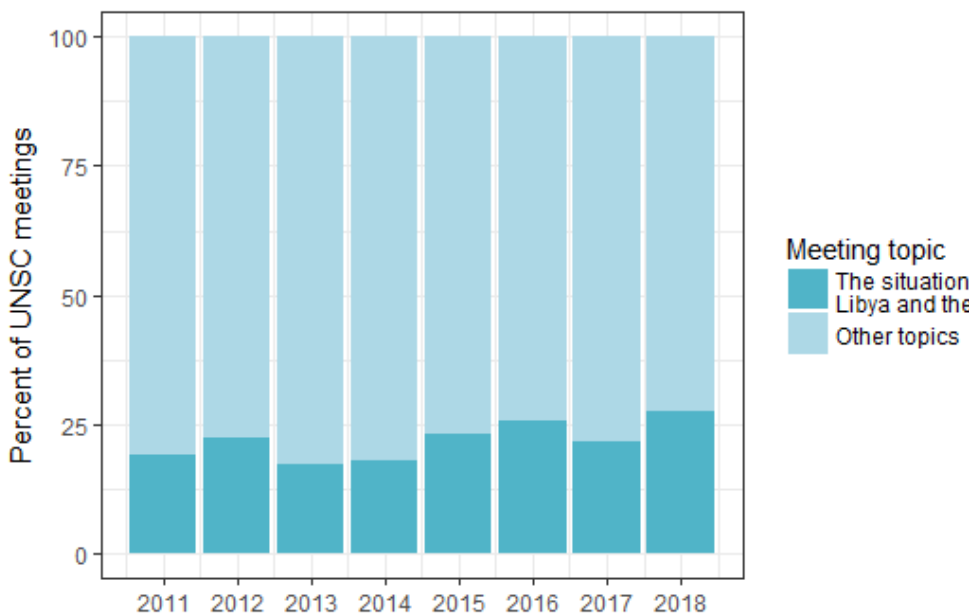
Other nations: Protests and uprisings related to the Arab Spring also took place in other countries as well, including: Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco and Oman.

4.4 Security Council on the Middle East

Since 2011, the situation in Syria, Libya, and the Middle East have consistently been a critical topic in the UNSC. About one in every four meetings of the Council, since the beginning of the Arab Uprisings, had the region as its subject. Figure 1 shows a slight increase the ratio of meetings about the Middle Eastern question over the years, especially since 2015: 2011, 19% of the UNSC meetings debated these questions. By 2018 (as of March), they represented 28% of the meetings. This number is quite significant when considering that the Security Council deals with

highly complex matters all over the world, what illustrates the importance of the Arab Uprisings and the Syrian Civil War to the international community.

Figure 1



Source: made by authors⁴

⁴ Using data from the online public record of the United Nations Security Council meetings.

5. TOPIC B: The Situation in Syria

5.1 The al-Assad's regime: from father to son

Syria is ruled, since July 2000, by Bashar al-Assad. Bashar rose to power after the death of his father, and previous Syrian president, Hafez al-Assad on June of that year. His father became president in 1971, when he conducted an internal coup after Syria's defeat in the Six-Day War against Israel.

Late 1960s imprinted great changes in the Middle East. Egypt went through a military coup in 1952 and the ideal of Arab nationalism and unity was rising. Declaring war on Israel, Syria, Egypt and Jordan tried to expand the pan-Arab principle. After the loss of the war⁵, Hafez al-Assad took the opportunity to conduct a coup on his Ba'ath Party colleagues by arresting the leader and his supporters. He accessed to power and became President of Syria.

On his first years as President, he worked to consolidate his influence by conducting changes in the Constitution and making himself the head of the party. He entrusted family members to high government and military positions, and friends

⁵ On the Six-Day war, Israel conquered the Golan Heights from Syria and annexed it to its territory.

and colleagues to political posts.

Hafez al-Assad also worked to diversify and open Syria's economy, but after initial increase and following decline of the economic situation, he was received with austerity measures by Arab's OPEP members. Al-Assad also pursued to better the lives of the farmers as well as the educational system and medical support. He further worked on improving gender equality by admitting women on legislative, executive and judiciary positions (Cleveland & Buntun, 2013).

On his foreign policy, Hafez al-Assad condemned Israeli actions towards the Palestinian land and developed good relations with other Arab leaders that shared their view on Israel. With a disposition of developing Arabian nationalism and creating an opposition to Israel's powers on the region, Syria aimed to increase its influence on neighboring countries such as Jordan and Lebanon. Al-Assad (father) also developed and invested highly on the military, the Syrian Armed Forces, costing up to 20% of the country's Gross National Production (Cleveland & Buntun, 2013).

Hafez al-Assad died on 10 June 2000. On that occasion, the Syrian legislative changed the Constitution to allow Hafez's son, Bashar al-Assad, only 34 years-old at the time, to be the

successor of his father government. The law determined 40-years-old as a minimum age for presidency. After that, a popular referend was held, and Bashar won with 97% of the votes (Mohammed, 2016).

Locally, Bashar maintained the policy towards Israel, and to this day does not recognize it as a State. He also continued to liberalize Syria's economy, making use of a "modern authoritarianism"⁶. Because of the United States sanctions and actions to isolate Syria politically and economically, al-Assad has developed multiple alliances with regional and distant countries. (DOSTAL; ZAROB, 2009)

5.2 The impact of the Arab Uprisings: how it leads to a civil war?

Right after assuming the government, in 2001, Bashar al-Assad was met with civilians' demands for reforms. The movement known as the Damascus Spring was conducted by the civil society and called for political changes. Syrians expected a

⁶ According to the Freedom House, the "modern authoritarianism" is a phenomenon "in which fundamentally antidemocratic governments have strengthened their hold on power by making at least some of a common set of concessions- largely illusory in nature."

positive response from the new, young and Western educated⁷ president, but they were received with political arrests and repressiveness. The movement was, thus, lead to a hibernating period.

A change of tides came with the rising protests in Arab countries, also known as Arab Spring or Arab Uprisings. Syrian involvement in peaceful protests and political demonstrations was reluctant, and it happened after those in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Jordan and Libya. Grasping inspiration from Egyptian protesters⁸, the revolts in Syria began on the internet. In January 2011, Syrian opposition groups called for a “Day of Rage” on social networks, inciting people to protest in Damascus on February 4 and 5. Although the movement was shy, it woke Syria’s population to call for political reforms from al-Assad’s rule.

On February 16, 2011, a few teenage boys from Daraa wrote on their school’s wall “doctor, your turn” in red paint, recalling the President’s background as a physician, a few weeks

⁷ Bashar Al-Assad conducted his postgraduate studies on ophthalmology in London, on the Western Eye Hospital.

⁸ Social network was fundamental for uniting protesters in Egypt and Tunisia, mostly Facebook and Twitter. Facebook was banned in Syria, but protesters managed to communicate through the Internet.

after the Egyptian and Tunisian leaders were overthrown in response of massive public protests. The boys were arrested and tortured by the local police. Protests were initially conducted to free the children and other political prisoners, but as they got bigger, the military repression rose as well.

In March, Daraa was surrounded by tanks and all the greatest cities in Syria, such as Damascus and Aleppo, were organizing protests. Syrian forces opened fire to the protesters in several occasions, and mass arrests were conducted. Soon, the riots and protests were calling for the fall of the al-Assad's family regime.

At the time, the region had undergone a grand drought, from 2007 to 2010, that caused rural exodus and inflated the urban area. That immersed Syria in greater poverty and unemployment, as well as fomented social unrest. Society's view on government corruption⁹ and the lack of representation of the Syrian people on the government¹⁰ also played roles in inciting

⁹ According to the 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index, Syria held a position of 127, out of 178 analyzed countries (of which 1 is perceived as very clean and 178 is perceived as highly corrupt)

¹⁰ The al-Assad government is ruled by the Alawites, a Shia minority that represents 12% of the Syrian population. They control the Ba'ath Party, the military and the State.

dissension.

In July 2011, defectors from the Syrian Armed Forces announced the creation of the Free Syrian Army. Syrians then started to break down in militias and rebel groups to fight the government forces. The civil war had started, and a proxy war was created.

5.3 The parts involved in the conflict

Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, in March 2011, the conflict has killed approximately 353,900 people¹¹. According to the UNHCR, over 5.4 million people have fled Syria since 2011¹². The war has left 6.1 million internally displaced persons; 13.1 million people in need of humanitarian assistance; and 2.98 million people in hard-to-reach and besieged areas¹³.

The country has, thus, been the center of a proxy

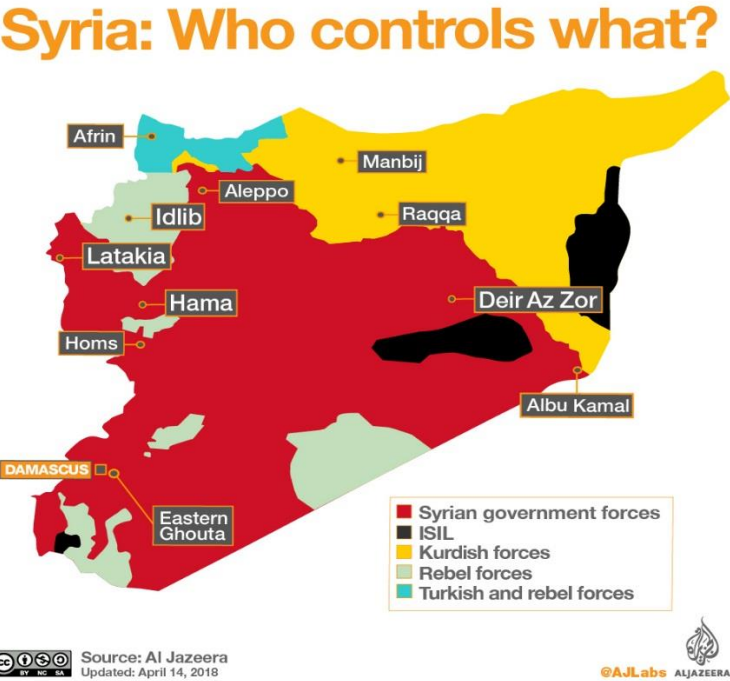
¹¹ Data from the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, March 2018. They do not include the 56,900-people reported missing and the estimated 100,000 undocumented deaths.

¹² Most Syrians have fled to neighbor countries, such as Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, but most refugees flee to Turkey. Only a small percentage, about 10, leave the region to go to Europe.

¹³ Data updated in December 2017.

battlefield, gathering external powers like the US, Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and ISIL. For that reason, the war is not limited to the government forces and the rebel forces. Religion, politics and economic interests become one, resulting in bloodshed and in a human-rights-breaching conflict, with no apparent end in sight.

Figure 2



Source: Al-Jazeera, April 2018.

5.4 Syrian government

Syrian Armed Forces

Led by the President Marshall Bashar al-Assad, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

Since the beginning of the civil war, the number of soldiers has drastically decreased. The reasons for that, besides the high casualty numbers, are desertions and evasions of compulsory military service, or what is commonly called draft dodging. From 2011 to 2014, the army capacity dropped more than a half of its original man-power. The desertions come, mainly from Sunni Islamic soldiers, and are encouraged and endorsed by the US and French governments.

The Syrian army is strongly and openly supported by the Russians. Their armor supplies come from Russia, as well as China, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Poland, Bolivia, Kazakhstan and other countries.

They control the cities of: Aleppo, Latakia, Tartus, Hama, Homs, Damascus, Palmyra and Al Bukamal.

National Defense Forces

The Syrian National Defense Forces was created from pro-government militias. Their primary role is to directly fight rebels and deal with insurgency movements.

Hezbollah

The Lebanon-based political and military organization was created in the 80s, with the support of the Iranian government, to expel the Israelis from their territory.

Hezbollah has been actively involved in the conflict since 2012. They have been keen to help Assad forces regain rebel-held locations. The group sees their participation on the Syrian Civil War as strategic. They form, alongside Iran and al-Assad's regime, an "axis of resistance" against Israel.

5.5 Anti-government forces/ main opposition groups

The insurgency against the al-Assad government forces is wide. The groups are organized in coalitions, fronts and alliances. The United States, United Kingdom, France and other Western countries have consistently backed moderate rebels. Turkey has supported the rebels fighting against the Kurdish militia. Saudi Arabia has also armed and financed rebel groups, as to create an opposition to the influence of Iran in the conflict.

Free Syrian Army (FSA)

Formed in 2011, mostly from an affiliation of defectors from the Syrian Armed Forces and civilians. It is an umbrella term for opposition groups and coalitions fighting al-Assad government. They are supported by the US and Turkey.

After the battle in Aleppo, they have control of: Idlib, Douma and the Eastern Ghouta suburb in Damascus.

Islamic Front

Created in 2013, the Syrian Islamic Front (SIF) reunited seven Islamist groups to form Syria's largest rebel military alliance. It aims to defeat Assad's government for the implementation of an Islamic state. Being an umbrella organization, their members do not follow a single Islamic ideology. Although it is a jihadist group, the Islamic Front does not have an association with Al-Qaeda or ISIS.

Al-Nusra Front

The Front for the Defense of the Syrian People, or al-Nusra, is a jihadist group formed in 2011. The originally formal al-Qaeda affiliated group¹⁴ in Syria fights for the implementation of an Islamic state under Sharia law. It is the second leading insurgent group operating in Syria after ISIL.

The Free Syrian Army has publicly declared opposed to the ideology of the group, but they have performed conjoint operations against pro-government forces.

Jaysh al-Islam

Formed in 2013 from smaller groups, the Syrian opposition group Jaysh al-Islam works against the Assad

¹⁴ The group today claims that it has separated from al-Qaeda

government, ISIL and the Kurdish forces. Seeks to overthrow the Assad leadership by implementing a Shari'ah law-based government. It helped found the Islamic Front. It has allegedly used chemical weapons against Kurdish forces in Aleppo, in 2016.

As of March 2018, it is the last rebel faction present in Eastern Ghouta and have reiterated that they do not wish to leave the region.

5.6 Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)

With beginnings tracing back to the Second Gulf War in 2003, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant seeks to implement a caliphate in the Middle East, essentially through violent acts. ISIL has had hostilities with other rebel, mainly Islamic, groups.

From the fragility of Syria, the IS rose quickly after its creation. By 2015, ISIL dominated the borders between Syria and Iraq, as well as a few populous cities like Aleppo. Because of its quick progress and grand propaganda, ISIL began to recruit foreign fighters. The United States, supporting rebels and Kurdish forces, and Russia, standing behind al-Assad army, were able to push back the group's growth. With the decrease of its reach, the number of soldiers and defenders also declined. The IS now encourages its supporters to conduct attacks on their home lands.

Today, ISIL no longer has control of a continuous territory or great urban centers. They control the area near Al Bukamal and are surrounded by government forces (in the west) and Kurdish militia (in the east).

5.7 Syrian Democratic Forces

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) is an alliance of Arab, Kurdish, Turkmen, Assyrian and Armenian groups with a federalist ideology. In January 2014, the territory of Rojava, in northern Syria, declared its regional independence. They have the support of the US and France, while Turkey is strongly against the group.

People's Protection Units (YPG)

YPG, or People's Protection Units, are Syrian-Kurdish forces that constitute the military force of the Kurdish party PYD (Democratic Union Party). Armed by the US, they have fought and defeated ISIL in several locations on northern Syria. The group has not engaged with the Syrian government forces but have long tried to acquire the right of self-government. They have fought with the FSA against ISIL. Islamist rebels accuse the Kurdish of conducting ethnic cleanse.

Women's Protection Units (YPJ)

Established in 2012, it constitutes the female brigade of the Kurdish party PYD. Along with YPG, has fought against ISIL for the control and protection of the Rojava region.

5.8 International actors

In the Middle East, the governments of Iran, Iraq and Lebanon have supported the Syrian Armed Forces and Assad's regime¹⁵, while Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia have shown support to the rebel forces¹⁶. Turkey has proceeded multiple operations against ISIL and the Kurds on the Turkish- Syrian borders. Israel has conducted airstrikes on government military facilities as well as Hezbollah's.

The Russians have military bases in Syria and have performed continuous bombings and airstrikes on "terrorists" and anti-Assad rebel groups. They have opposed international military intervention, mostly US'. The United States has claimed that their priority in Syria is to end the Islamic State. In 2013, the American civil Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) initiated a program to fund and train rebels, but it was quickly shut down. In 2017, the US carried out a direct military attack on Assad's

¹⁵ Iran and Iraq are mostly of Shia population; Hezbollah is a Shia group based in Lebanon.

¹⁶ These countries are of Sunni-majority.

forces.

On 13 April 2018, the UN Secretary General António Guterres said, while opening an UNSC meeting, that “the Cold War is back with a vengeance, but with a difference - the mechanisms and the safeguards to manage the risks of escalation that existed in the past no longer seem to be present”.

5.9 Recent conflicts

The siege in Aleppo

Aleppo has been, in several moments, a battlefield. When the rebel forces started losing coordination, in 2013, the IS took advantage to spread their power. For a small period of that year, ISIL held control of most part of Aleppo, Syria’s greatest city at the time. The rebels united to fight them and were successful. But they lost man-power and were overruled by the Syrian Armed Forces, which took back the control of the city in December 2016.

The siege in Eastern Ghouta

Located on the east area of the Syrian capital, Damascus, Eastern Ghouta has been a rebel-held enclave since 2013. As the last rebel fortress around the capital, it has become, since early 2018, the focus of a series of attacks from the Syrian army. As of

March 2018, more than 1,000 Syrians had been killed and approximately 6,750 had been evacuated.

The conflict in Afrin

In March 2018, Turkish forces took control of the city of Afrin, on northern Syria. Along with the Free Syrian Army, on the so-called Operation Olive Branch, they seek to expel Kurdish resistance from the borders.

5.10 The use of chemical weapons

In 2012, Syria publicly communicated that it possessed chemical weapons, but only for usage against foreign threats. On that same year, the first alleged poisonous gas attack was reported in Homs. Seven people died after showing symptoms of nausea, relaxed muscles, blurred vision and trouble breathing.

On the following year, after the alleged use of chemical weapons on the outskirts of Aleppo, the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, launched a UN Mission to investigate the uses of chemical agents on attacks in Syria. On August 21, 2013, a massive attack took place in the besieged area of Ghouta. A French intelligence report on the matter confirmed the involvement of the Syrian regime, while an US intelligence report accounted for 1,429 deaths. The UN investigation confirmed the

use of sarin gas.

Syria signed the Chemical Weapons Convention¹⁷ in October 2013 and agreed to let the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) destroy all of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal. Still, there were continuous claims of chlorine, ammonia and sarin usage on civilians. Some have been conducted by the IS, while some are claimed, by the opposition groups, to be conducted by the Syrian forces.

In 2017, eighty-six people died in the rebel-held region of Khan Sheikhoun, of which 27 were children¹⁸. Shocking images emerged on the internet showing children convulsing and showing symptoms of nerve gas exposure. A few days later, the United States conducted an air attack on a Syrian base, from where the Americans claimed the chemical bombs were launched.

Assad soon questioned the validity of such images, affirming they were Western-fabricated to corroborate US' assault, and that the chemical attack was conducted by Al-Qaeda. The US, UK and France reacted to the event by taking the matter

¹⁷ The Convention does not prohibit the use of chlorine, when on a weapon, but bans other chemical agents like sarin gas.

¹⁸ Data from the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

to the UNSC, where Russia vetoed the resolution condemning the attack¹⁹.

Since early 2018, there have been reported three chlorine attacks in the city of Douma. In late February 2018, an alleged chemical attack took place in the besieged rebel-held area of Eastern Ghouta²⁰ as part of Assad-forces campaign to conquest the region. In February 24th, the UN Security Council unanimously approved a Resolution that called for a 30-day ceasefire²¹. As a result, the airstrikes and shelling diminished but did not stop completely.

In April, Douma was the center of a joint US-France-UK attack on Syrian research and military targets after an alleged chemical attack. The international intervention happened a few days following the chemical use and deaths reports surfaced. After a week of negotiations and two UNSC meetings on the matter of creating another chemical weapon investigative mechanism and allowing humanitarian aid on the area, little

¹⁹ See page 32 of this Guide.

²⁰ One of Syria's last rebel-held territory around the capital Damascus.

²¹ The ceasefire did not include the cessation of operations against ISIL, Al-Qaeda and Al-Nusra Front.

progress was made ²². An OPCW team was established to investigate the area but upon arrival, it was denied access by the Syria and Russia military. Later that week, without international consent, the Western powers airstrikes happened.

6. Security Council on the situation in Syria

UNSC Resolutions on Syria

In 2012²³, the Council stated the importance of reducing the use of military forces to adequately implement of Kofi Annan's²⁴ peace proposal. Consisting of a six-point plan in which the Syrian Government would need to commit to working with the Group sent by the Council:

(1) to ensure the development of policies that would best benefit the Syrian population;

²² The Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations claimed, that week, that “there were no chemical substances found on the ground, no dead bodies found, no poised people in the hospitals”.

²³ Resolution 2042 (2012).

²⁴ Kofi Annan is a diplomat from Ghana who served as UN Secretary General from January 1997 to December 2006. He received, in 2001, the Nobel Peace Prize, which was divided between him and the UN. In 2012, he was appointed as the first UN Special Envoy for Syria and received support of the Arab League. After a few months, he resigned, claiming inflexibility from the Syrian government, the rebel forces and the Security Council.

(2) to stop all military violence for the protection of the civilian population and to stabilize the country's social situation;

(3) to ensure access to relief groups in all areas affected by the conflict;

(4) to release political prisoners and provide a list of all the places where those persons were being held;

(5) to guarantee freedom of movement throughout the national territory without discrimination of the individual; and, finally,

(6) to respect the right of association and expression legally guaranteed.

Soon after²⁵, the Security Council established, for a period of 90 days, a supervisory mission²⁶, with the dispatch of 300 unarmed observers, to monitor the agreed ceasefire and secure the implementation of the six-point peace plan to put an end to the conflict.

The Council has also, on multiple occasions, condemned the actions of opposition groups and the Syrian government²⁷ regarding the continuous disruption of human rights and the

²⁵ Resolution 2043(2012).

²⁶ To be known as UNSMIS- United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria

²⁷ Resolutions 2139 (2014) and 2268 (2016).

impediment of humanitarian access. It has also condemned the utilization of chemical weapons in the war and threatened to intervene militarily and lead economic sanctions should such instruments be used again²⁸.

To investigate complaints made about the illegal utilization of chemical instruments, in particular, chlorine gas and sarin gas, the Council authorized, in 2015²⁹, the establishment of a joint mechanism operation with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The mechanism was to be in charge of recognizing groups responsible for the use of chemical weapons.

They have also promoted ceasefires³⁰. One of the most recent UNSC Resolution on Syria, from 2018³¹, urged the parties to cease the attacks for a period of 30 days to implement a humanitarian truce.

The request for a 30-day truce, co-sponsored by Kuwait and Sweden, was drafted to ensure the evacuation of civilians and patients from Eastern Ghouta. Such a resolution was unanimously

²⁸ Resolution 2209 (2015)

²⁹ Resolution 2235 (2015)

³⁰ Resolution 2254 (2015)

³¹ Resolution 2401 (2018)

approved, immediately calling for the cessation of hostilities to allow access to humanitarian aid groups. However, the Syrian Government and the Russian troops continued the attacks in the city. Although it generated severe repression of the international community, no sanction was implemented, because that resolution did not anticipate any punitive measure if displeased.

UNSC Vetoes on Syria

From October 2011 to February 2018, twelve UN Security Council proposals on intervention in the Middle East conflicts were vetoed. The first resolutions vetoed (*S / 2011/612 and S / 2012/77*) at the UN Security Council, on the war in Syria, condemned the violence by the State and threatened to impose sanctions on the government of Assad.

Russia and China have repeatedly vetoed Draft Resolutions. Russia's most recurring argument is that the interests of some countries for intervention are affected by political connections, which is not in line with the purpose of the UN of mediating conflicts. China, on the other hand, has affirmed that Syria's national sovereignty should be preserved, that no international military intervention is necessary and that a political

settlement should be implemented.

In 2015, the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM)³² was created to send reports on any use of chemical weapons in Syria, as well as to identify those responsible for them. In 2017, Russia vetoed the Draft³³ that intended on extending for another year the period of operation of this mechanism, which would continue to investigate cases where chemical weapons were used in the country. Russia exercised its veto on two further attempts³⁴ to renew the body's mandate.

7. Final considerations

As part of Kofi Annan's peace plan for Syria, the UN backed the Geneva II peace conference on Syria. It took place in 2014 and it reunited several countries as well as international organizations, like the Arab League. As no political solution was found, the Geneva conferences continued to happen in 2016 and 2017. The Astana talks were also conducted, between 2017 and 2018, however, after nine rounds of UN-mediated talks, little

³² The OPCW-UN Joint Mission on the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons completed its mandate on 30 September 2014 after working on the declared chemical weapons program of the Syrian Arab Republic for 12 months.

³³ Draft S/ 2017/ 884.

³⁴ Drafts S/ 2017/ 962 and S/ 2017/ 970.

progress was shown. The most recent Russia-promoted Sochi talks likewise have not made advancements, as the opposition groups have denied attending.

Despite being a rich region, in the last decades, geopolitical disputes in the Middle East have constituted a reality of endless conflicts. The war in Syria is considered the biggest humanitarian catastrophe of modern history, with more than 400,000 dead, demonstrating the disunity and inefficiency of international bodies in resolving the matter. The UN Security Council discusses the conflict since its inception, passing some resolutions with palliative responses to pressing problems, far from resolving the situation. It has continually affirmed, as well as the UN, the need of a peaceful political transition led by the Syrians.

Even though repudiating the atrocities committed against the Syrian population, the international community lacks effective policies to minimize the problem, with the most notable polarization being among the permanent members of the Security Council. The parts involved in the conflict do not seem to invest in a permanent end to the civil war and the suffering of thousands. Current discussions move further away from a peaceful solution. On March 15 of 2018, Syria entered its eighth year of civil war.

Regarding the Security Council's goal in promoting international peace and security, and UN's humanitarian principles, the delegates of this Committee shall discuss those matters presented in this Guide and work towards an effective solution.

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