

Forum: Security Council

Issue: The Situation In Syria

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Introduction

Syria is a nation in the Middle East, along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. It has a population of 22 million and is both ethnically and religiously diverse. It is currently embroiled in a civil war, pitching the incumbent dictator, Bashar al-Assad, against opposition forces seeking to oust him. The Syrian Civil War was sparked amid the Arab Spring after protests for democracy were brutally put down. The unrest has been ongoing since March 2011.

Caption #1. Map of Syria

The Syrian Civil War is multifaceted and extremely complex. Sectarian conflict (Sunni v Shi'a), political conflict and military conflict dominate the Syrian uprising. A holistic understanding of the conflict, which this research report aims to provide, is thus required to solve the main issues plaguing the conflict. Delegates are encouraged to research beyond the boundaries of this report to shed further light on the crisis.

Definition of Key Terms

Syria

Syria, officially known as the Syrian Arab Republic, was established in the aftermath of the First World War. After a series of military coups and coup attempts, a dictatorship under Hafez al-Assad's Ba'ath party was established. In 2000, his son, Bashar al-Assad, succeeded him and is the current ruler of the state.

Syria's capital is Damascus. In 2012, Syria became a non-single party state for the first time in history, but it still operates largely under the control of Assad's crushing regime. According to Human Rights Watch, it has one of the worst human right records in the world, frequently engaging in practices concerning arbitrary detention, torture and gender inequality. It is currently embroiled in a civil war.

Arab Spring

The Arab Spring was a revolutionary movement of protests and demonstrations that swept across the Arab world beginning in 2010. Instigated by dissatisfaction with dictatorial and corrupt governments, economic decline and extreme poverty, many youths took to the streets to call for the implementation of governmental reform, with some movements calling for the replacement of dictators with democratically elected leaders.

Notable movements include the ousting of the Egyptian and Tunisian governments. The Syrian Civil War's opposition parties were born out of this movement.

Islam

Islam is a monotheistic religion articulated by the Quran. Practitioners of Islam are called Muslims. The Middle East, including Syria, is dominated by Muslims.

Islam's many denominations are a significant source of tension in the Middle East, and within Syria. **Sunni** Islam is the largest branch of Islam, and represents the majority population in Syria. **Shia** Islam is the second largest denomination of Islam, a minority in Syria. **Alawi** is a branch of Shia Islam and is practiced by Assad and the Ba'ath party.

Chemical weapons

Chemical weapons are weapons of war used to inflict mass deaths. Its strength lies in its

ease of dispersion and the wide target it reaches.

Sarin gas is such as weapon and is a colourless, odorless liquid that acts as a nerve agent. It is lethal even in small doses, and side effects include permanent neurological damage and death.

History

The Arab Spring incited the current civil war in Syria, with previously oppressed citizens rising up against the rule of a dictator.

Following the escalation of violence and protests in January to August 2011, the Syrian Civil War began to take form in September 2011 with the beginnings of organized attacks on both sides of the conflict.

In the first few months of 2012, the monitoring mission of the Arab League failed, and a UN backed ceasefire pursued by Kofi Annan similarly failed. This occurred amidst both parties nominal commitments to end the violence.

This escalation of conflict continued throughout 2012 and entered into 2013. Amid reports that chemical weapons were used in Syria, Obama made a speech announcing his intent to order a strike in Syria if they crossed the 'red line' he set of using chemical weapons. However, this bill was eventually failed by the Senate and House of Representatives.

More than 100,000 have been killed in the conflict, with over 2 million refugees and many more internally displaced. Other effects have been a destabilization of the geopolitics of the region, sectarian conflict and a worsening humanitarian crisis. The conflict has no clear end in sight.

Syrian Leader

Bashar al-Assad

Assad has shown himself to be ruthless and willing to use any means necessary to achieve his aims. Neither armistice nor democratic elections seem to be an agreeable solution to Assad. However, it is notable that he did back down when USA threatened to go to war with Syria, agreeing to demolish their nuclear stockpile.

Key Issues

Humanitarian crisis

Refugee crisis

António Guterres, the head of the United Nations' refugee agency (UNHCR) described the refugee crisis in Syria as a "calamity with suffering and displacement unparalleled in recent history"¹. About a tenth of the population, 2.2 million in number, are registered as refugees. Many more flee the borders of Syria without registering. Furthermore, there are approximately 6.5 million Syrians who are internally displaced peoples (IDPs).

Syrian refugees are predominantly spread across five countries: Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. Within Syria itself, the internally displaced migrate as the violence relocates, living from the kindness of relatives or strangers.

Lack of basic food supplies

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) estimates that over 7 million Syrians are in need of urgent food assistance, the WFP's largest emergency to date. Though financial aid is a major problem, the WFP have also struggled to enter war torn and isolated areas in Syria.

The UN WFP has been urging the international community to continue to support the large scale aid programs.

Impact of winter

In sub-zero temperatures and lack of basic shelter and protection from the cold, many children are especially vulnerable to the volatile weather conditions. This cold may also expose them to pneumonia, hypothermia and other deadly respiratory diseases. The lack of heating and food in large cities are evidence of the severe lack of basic infrastructure in

¹ <http://www.unhcr.org/522495669.html>

Syria.

Chemical Weapons

In August 2012, US President Barack Obama drew a 'red line' for American involvement: the use of chemical or biological weaponry. In June 2013, reports that Syria had use **sarin** gas emerged. Obama authorized sending arms to Syrian rebels, but before any further military action was taken, a diplomatic solution backed by Russia was taken. Under the agreement, Syria has agreed to joining and working with the **Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)**. It is responsible for the Chemical Weapons Convention (1997). The Assad regime submitted its chemical weapons inventory to the OPCW in September 2013. All chemical weapons must be removed from Syria by mid 2014.

By the end of 2013, 500 tonnes of nerve agents have to be removed for safe destruction. The process for transport of these weapons through embattled ground is dangerous and risky: the roads required to transport the weapons are contested ground. The OPCW has to largely rely on regime forces and Hezbollah. UN secretary-general Ban Ki-Moon, in a leaked letter to the UNSC, has called this stage of the mission 'highly dangerous'.

Human Rights Violations

Both the rebel groups and government forces have been accused of severe human rights violations, including torture of prisoners of war (POWs).

Radicalism

The rise of radical Islam within rebel groups poses a key problem. Suicide bombings and other jihadist activities have been traced to terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda, poised to shake up the already unstable Syria. This influx of radical Muslims, with affiliations to terrorist's organizations, are coming from abroad to suppress the Syrian autocracy and establish an Islamic state. This shift has made Western governments reluctant to arm the rebels. This could also have a profound impact on the wider region.

The Ongoing Violence

It has been nearly three years since the beginning of the Syrian conflict and there are few signs of a conclusion. This mainly stems from the lack of compromise: hardliners from all sides of the conflict are unwilling to budge.

Though Russia and America are both eager to see an end to the war, Saudi Arabia and Iran remain committed to funding the war. The peace conference scheduled for January 2014 is a glimmer of hope, but many believe that the deeply fractured opposition will not be able to cooperate to come to a political solution.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Syrian government and their allies

The **Ba'ath Party** is led by President Bashar al-Assad, whose father seized power in a coup in 1970. Support from the Ba'ath party mainly stems from the Alawite minority and Shia Muslims in a nation dominated by Sunnis.

Hezbollah

Hezbollah is a Shia Islamic militant group and political party based in Lebanon. It has been labeled as a terrorist organization in many nations, including the United States of America (USA) and Israel.

Hezbollah's ideology is one of Shia radicalism. It receives economic, military and political support from the Syrian government.

Iran

As a nation dominated by Shia Muslims, Iran is eager to see the Ba'ath Party stay in power to maintain Shia power in the region.

Russia

Russia has been Syria's main ally in the United Nations Security Council, blocking all

pro-Western resolutions on the Syrian Crisis with China. Russia and Syria have been allies since the Cold War. However, their exact interests in Syria are unclear: they have halted arms exports to Syria and their naval base seems to be of little use.

The Opposition

The opposition movement is deeply fractured and is composed of multiple bodies fighting for control over the nation. The major players have been cited below.

Syrian National Council

The **Syrian National Council** (hereby referred to as **SNC**) is the main opposition body in exile. Their main armed wing, located in Turkey, is called the **Supreme Military Command (SMC)**. In December 2012, many Western nations officially recognized them as Syria's official government.

Free Syrian Army

The **Free Syrian Army** is another group seen as the leaders of the opposition, mainly formed from defecting members of the Syrian army. However, many Syrians are rejecting their authorities due to their failure to end the war.

Islamic Front

Islamist leaning groups have rejected the SMC and sought to consolidate power among 13 major rebel groups by forming the **Islamic Front**. This Front is not extremist in nature.

Jihadist Extremists

There are also other religious extremist **Jihadist** groups opposing the regime, such as the Nusra Front, who claim to represent al-Qaeda in Syria.

United State of America

The United States of America has been supporting the SNC. However, a report of **increased** jihadist activities among the rebels, as well as a worsening humanitarian crisis has made Americans wary. Coupled with America's foreign policy disaster of the last decade, such as the 2003 Iraq War, they are eager to see an end to the conflict.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia, a majority **Sunni** Muslim nation, has invested in the Syrian civil war due to the involvement of Sunni Muslims fighting the Syrian government. They see the Alawite ruling party and Hezbollah as their biggest threat. Some trace the origins of the Islamic Front to Saudi Arabia.

Though tension between Saudi Arabia and Syria has always been strained, it reached a fever pitch in the Syrian Civil War, with Saudi Arabia essentially fighting a proxy war through the rebels. They have reportedly started training 5,000 rebels in Jordan after disappointment in the weak Western response to the use of chemical weapons.

The United Nations

The permanent five in the UN Security Council remain split. Russia and China have blocked efforts by Western countries to pass harsh sanctions and authorize military involvement. It was deadlocked on allegations of chemical weapons use by Assad's regime.

In December 2013, it was determined by the UN that chemical weapons were indeed used repeatedly by the Syrian government.

Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Below is a timeline of the Syrian conflict thus far. Key events below have been highlighted in bold.

Date	Description of event
March 2011	Protests begin
November 2011	Arab League suspends Syrian membership
April 2012	UN brokers ceasefire and sends monitors to Syria (UNSC Resolution 2042 and 2043)
June 2012	UN suspends mission in Syria
May 5th, 2013	Israeli strikes inside Syria
August 31 st , 2013	Obama calls Congress for a vote amidst concerns that chemical weapons

were used by Assad in Syria

September 9th,
2013

Russia proposes Syria give up chemical weapons

September 27th,
2013

UNSC unanimously adopts Resolution 2118 that requires the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Many parties have tried and failed to deal with this conflict, from illustrious diplomats such as Kofi Annan to governing bodies such as the UN SC and the Arab League.

The Security Council has been repeatedly debating the situation in Syria but any real resolutions detailing possible solutions to the conflict have been vetoed by Russia, and their voting ally, China. This stems from a central systemic problem within the SC: nations protecting their self interest over furthering the charter of the UN to reach a consensus and work towards a better world.

Possible Solutions

The current situation in Syria is unsustainable in the long run. Refugees are draining the resources of other countries. Lebanon's tiny population has swollen by a quarter from Syrian refugees. Refugees and IDPs are in need of physiological and psychological aid and the UNHCR has raised only 62% of the funds required to deal with the crisis. The ongoing violence and human rights violations are an unfortunate byproduct of two diametrically opposed sides pitted against each other in a bitter struggle for dominance. The use of chemical weapons was bred out of this desperation, in a worsening spiral into disorder. The only sustainable solution is for the war to end.

Any solution requires all sides to cooperate and to compromise. Since domestic forces within Syria are so embattled, an alternative is for outsiders (Iran, US, Saudi Arabia, Russia) to engineer a 'mutually hurting stalemate'. In this, neither side can advance and the costs of retaining war are high: outsiders could engineer a situation where peace is the least bad option.

Though the Security Council's efforts should primarily be focused on ending the war, they

should also strive to alleviate the other problems. Possible solutions for the humanitarian problems include transparency to allow clear allocation of funds and prevent corruption and temporary schools in refugee camps.

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