

Security Council

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Research report

Forum: Security Council

Issue: Discussing and solving the Syrian Civil war

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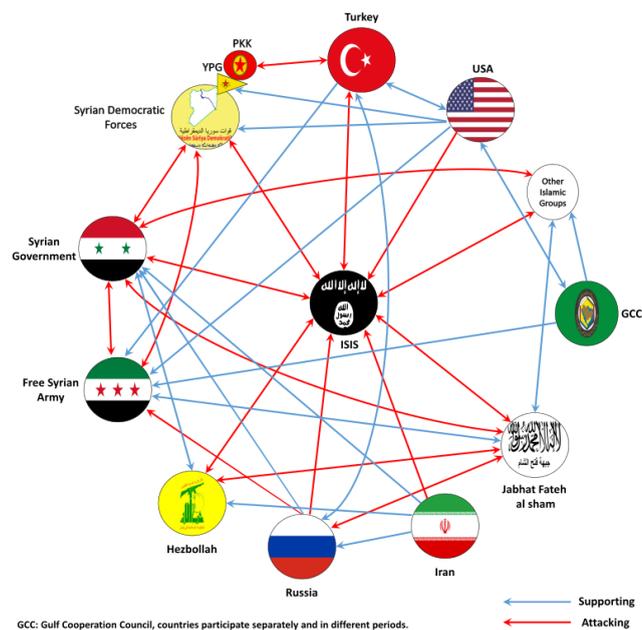
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Introduction

10 years ago, in March 2011, peaceful pro-democracy protests against the syrian government, or more specifically President Bashar Al Assad's regime, kick started what is now known as the syrian Civil war. These protests were initiated to combat the government due to the high unemployment rates, government corruption, and lagging drought among other issues.¹ The president's regime did not hesitate to begin using violence in an attempt to silence those who demonstrated against them, however, this only further escalated the situation by enabling the opposition to also take measures into their own hands, ultimately leading to the extremity of war.²

The Syrian civil war is without a doubt a complex issue with the involvement of several nations and many consequences for Syrian civilians. The following diagram visualizes the complexity posed by the involvement of both domestic and foreign parties.

Figure 1: diagram showing the participants in the Syrian civil war³



In regard to the consequences faced by Syrian citizens, many have been left homeless after their houses have been damaged or destroyed due to the war. This has resulted in a major

¹ Marks, Julie. "Why Is There a Civil War in Syria?" *HISTORY*, HISTORY, 14 Sept. 2018, www.history.com/news/syria-civil-war-assad-rebels.

² "Syrian Civil War | Facts & Timeline | Britannica." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2021, www.britannica.com/event/Syrian-Civil-War.

³ Wikipedia Contributors. "Foreign Involvement in the Syrian Civil War." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 5 July 2021, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreign_involvement_in_the_Syrian_civil_war#/media/File:Participants_in_Syrian_Civil_War-en.svg.

refugee crisis with over 6 million people being internally displaced (IDP), and more having been forced out of Syria altogether.⁴

The following research report goes into more depth on the specificities of the issue and can be used as the basis of your preparation.

Definition of key terms

'Alawite

Sect of Shia Islam, which is the relatively smaller division of Islam

Arab League

League of Arab states; regional organization located in Africa and western Asia similar to the UN

Extremist

A person who goes to extremes, especially in political matters sometimes taking illegal measures

Internally Displaced Person (IDP)

Someone who is forced to flee their home but remains within their country's borders so is not technically labelled as a refugee

Sunni

Largest denomination of Islam regarded as the traditional and mainstream branch of Islam

General overview

The peaceful protests of March 2011 led to something no one could have expected, not even President Assad. Initially, after taking over his late father's position as president, he was expected to aid the modernization and liberation of Syria and its citizens. This however quickly took a turn once Assad began following in the footsteps of his father through the use of heavy censorship, surveillance, and, as reflected in his actions after the protests, the use of violence against those who do go against his regime. This, however, was not the only cause for protest.

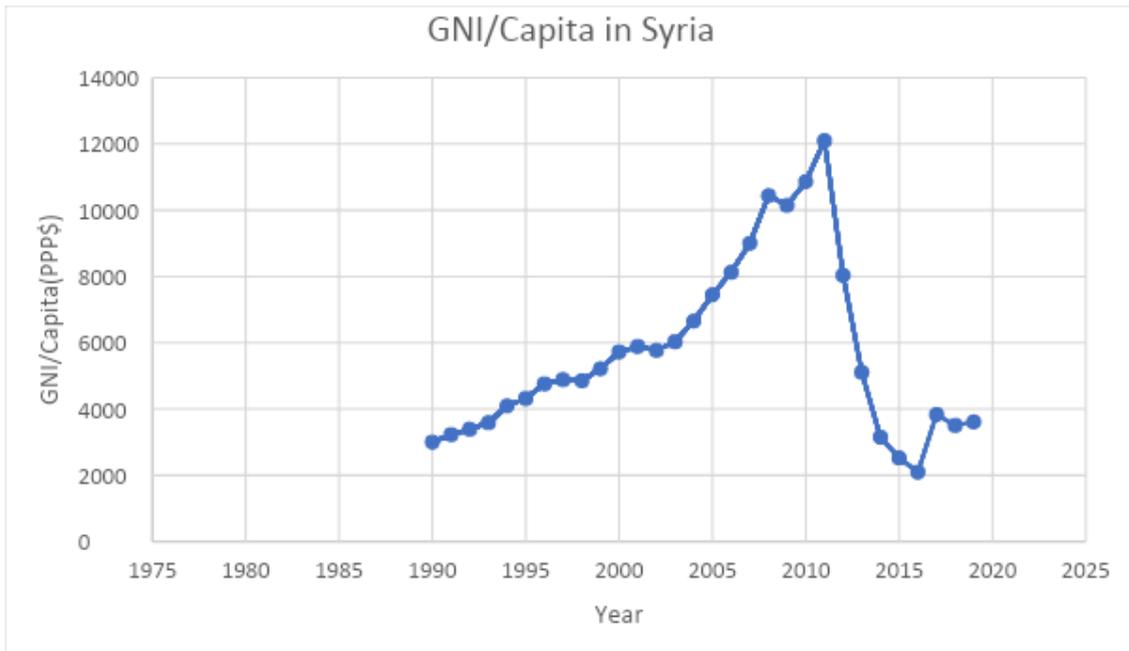
From 2006 to 2010, the country faced the worst drought in Syrian history leading to the impoverishment of hundreds of thousands of farming families. The area where these families lived was also where the first protests took place, resulting in the arresting and torturing of children by authorities for graffiti which went against the regime. The economic impacts of the drought can be seen in the diagram below:

Figure 2: GNI/capita in Syria (graph produced from data collected by the UNDP HDR) ⁵

⁴ "Topic: The Syrian Civil War." *Statista*, Statista, 2020, www.statista.com/topics/4216/the-syrian-civil-war/.

⁵ "[Human Development Reports." *Undp.org*, 2020, hdr.undp.org/en/indicators/195706.

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As seen in figure 2, towards the end of the drought it is visible that the GNI/capita decreases in 2008 and 2009 before rising shortly and then of course the economic consequences of the war can very clearly be found from 2012 onwards. It should also be noted that although there was a major decline in the country's economy, it only came to that level before dropping due to Assad. Unfortunately, he undid his work even quicker than he developed it.

Next to the two general parties being Assad vs the people, the conflict stems from something deeper, linking back to religion. Several of the protestors were members of the Sunni, a branch of Islam under which the majority of those who follow the religion are found. The Assad family on the other hand are part of the 'Alawite branch of Islam. Although this distinction was not very profound naturally, Assad worsened them by painting an image of Sunni Islamic extremists.⁶

The more the people fought, the harder the government fought back, introducing stronger weaponry, and even using large vehicles such as tanks to drive people out of the country, and worsening the refugee situation as the people fled to Turkey. As the situation progressed, it became clearer to other nations that it was time to intervene. The United States of America and the EU were both supporters of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), with President Obama and multiple EU heads of state calling upon Assad to step down as they learned more and more about the ongoings in Syria. Opposingly, Iran and Russia both continued to support the Syrian government showing how what began as small and peaceful protest soon erupted into an international matter. This larger conflict is reflected in the UN Security Council's records stating that Russia and China used their veto rights to stop a resolution that would condemn Assad's actions.⁷

By September 2011, attacks became a regular occurrence, increasing the conflict's status to civil war. By the end of 2011, many international organizations attempted to bring an end to the conflict. Firstly, in November of 2011, Syrian officials had agreed to a ceasefire initiative

⁶ "Syrian Civil War | Facts & Timeline | Britannica." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2021, www.britannica.com/event/Syrian-Civil-War.

⁷ "Syrian Civil War - Civil War | Britannica." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2021, www.britannica.com/event/Syrian-Civil-War/Civil-war.

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brought across by the Arab League. This called upon the Syrian government to stop violence against protestors, remove tanks and other armored vehicles from cities, and release political prisoners. Then following this ceasefire, the government agreed to have the implementation of their plan overseen by monitors from the Arab league visiting Syria, however, this did not go as planned. It quickly became clear that the Arab league had failed to provide enough monitors and resources to properly oversee the mission and to make matters worse, Assad had made sure to make the Arab league's mission more difficult by getting in the way of the monitors' plans. This mission came to an end in January 2012.⁸

After the failed Arab League mission, international assistance was needed as a second attempt to end the war. The UN formed the Geneva II conference to create a road map for the negotiations which were to take place in order to reestablish and better the Syrian system of governance. Here they created the Geneva communique (see appendix A)

Mid 2012 proved to be a successful time for the rebels with the withdrawal of government troops allowing for the rebels to gain control of a larger amount of territory including Aleppo, Syria's largest city. The fighting carried on, leading to a daily increase in civilian deaths. International aid grew, with help from Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar to fund and arm the rebels. The United States too began helping by training and equipping some of the rebel groups. The Syrian government, on the other hand, was being helped by Iran and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, both of which were sending them weapons and eventually also fighters to go against the rebels.

The situation worsened significantly after the introduction of chemical weapons into the war in August 2013. Assad was initially blamed for these happenings but denied said claims saying that if anyone it was the rebels who carried out the attacks. The U.S, Britain, and France denounced the use of chemical weapons and announced that they were considering the possibility of retaliation. Russia, China, and Iran countered this and opposed the idea of using military action. No further internationally funded attacks took place and instead Russia, Syria, and the U.S reached an agreement to place all of the chemical weapons currently in Syria's possession under international control. This was carried out by June 2014.

Islamist militants gained more attention in 2013 as they partnered with al-Qaeda and later with other forces in Iraq and Syria to form a new group: Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL also known as ISIS). They then encountered multiple successful missions, gaining more and more territory in Syria and Iraq.

By mid 2015, Russia's involvement in the war also largely grew. They deployed troops with military equipment to an airbase in Syria and later launched air strikes against their targets in Syria. They had claimed that their attacks were aimed at ISIL, but it was clear that they were in fact aimed at the rebels in order to help Assad. After the end of a short ceasefire, Russian and Syrian forces shifted their focus to where the rebels were concentrated most: Aleppo. With no compassion towards the civilians, the two nations began bombing the city, targeting medical facilities, search and rescue teams, and aid workers.

⁸ "Syrian Civil War - Civil War | Britannica." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2021, www.britannica.com/event/Syrian-Civil-War/Civil-war.

Since then, more chemical attacks have taken place as well as heavy international involvement. The situation remains complex and fragile with the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent people lost and even more displaced from their homes.

Major parties involved

Syria (government vs FSA)

The conflict of course stems from within Syria itself between the Syrian people (mostly lead by the FSA) and the Syrian government. The FSA formed in July 2011 and aimed to fight back against Assad's regime. They did not aim to hold territory but instead aimed to spread government forces thin during battles to destabilize the center of government. They later became more reliant on Turkey for supplies.

Iran and Russia

Both Iran and Russia have backed the Syrian government from the very beginning of the war in order to help keep Assad in control. This support has come in many different forms including weaponry, transport, and troops. Russia has also helped Syria during UN conferences regarding the war by vetoing resolutions which aimed to take down Assad's regime.

Turkey

Turkey took the side of the Syrian people very quickly offering them assistance and shelter and even speaking up about the fact that *their own* president was undertaking violent actions against them. Turkey has also supplied the FSA with resources and means to fight the government.

Gulf states

The gulf states have, similarly to Turkey, have supported the Syrian people with financial support as well as weaponry and political help.

United States of America

The US has helped the Syrian rebels using military intervention involving other nations such as the UK, France, and Jordan among others in the fight against ISIL. Next to this they also supplied the FSA with food and transport before beginning to provide training, money, and knowledge. They also launched an airstrike campaign against ISIL during Trump's presidency.

Timeline of key events

March 15th 2011	Antigovernment protests held in cities around Syria
March 24th 2011	Dozens of protestors killed after security forces open fire on a demonstration
April 12th 2011	Government begins to use heavy military weaponry against protests

⁹ Wikipedia Contributors. "American-Led Intervention in the Syrian Civil War." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 10 July 2021, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American-led_intervention_in_the_Syrian_civil_war.

July 29th 2011	The formation of the Free Syrian Army is announced
October 4th 2011	China and Russia veto UN SC resolution which condemned the Syrian government's crackdown
April 12th 2012	UN-sponsored cease fire takes effect
July 14th 2012	Red cross declares the conflict as a civil war
August 21st 2012	Assad forces are accused of using chemical weapons
August 30th 2013	U.S announces the consideration of military intervention
September 14th 2013	US Russia and Syria agree to place Syria's chemical weapons under international control
January 22nd 2014	Geneva II takes place, no conclusion reached
June 30th 2014	ISIL declared itself a caliphate
September 30th 2015	Russia carries out first airstrikes in Syria
December 22nd 2016	Syrian government declares victory in Aleppo
March 5th 2020	Ceasefire brokered by Turkey and Russia

Previous attempts to solve the issue

As mentioned previously, there have been attempts made to solve the issue by the UN, namely the Geneva conferences. These have aimed to bring international awareness to the issue and targeted the downfall of Assad's regime and a transition towards a fairer system of governance. One partly successful step taken was the agreement of the Geneva communique (see Appendix A) however, the implementation was not as successful as the idea itself. The UN itself is not strong enough to bring the conflict to an end. Since Geneva II, Geneva III and IV have also taken place, however neither have been successful in achieving their goal.¹⁰

Furthermore, the Astana talks, Sochi, and a four-way summit in Istanbul have been held in attempts to lead to a ceasefire but none have been successful. (See more here)¹¹

Overview of possible solutions

The previous attempts to solve the issue show a wide range of perspectives which need to be taken into account when finding a solution. It is not as simple as calling a ceasefire as there has already been an extremely large amount of damage which has taken place. Elements such as humanitarian help for the civilians, restoration of housing, and the need for justice against various crimes must be touched upon in your resolutions.

¹⁰ Wikipedia Contributors. "Geneva II Conference on Syria." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 5 July 2021, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geneva_II_Conference_on_Syria.

¹¹ TRTWorld. "A Brief History of Peace Attempts and Failures in Syria." *A Brief History of Peace Attempts and Failures in Syria*, TRT World, 27 Oct. 2018, www.trtworld.com/mea/a-brief-history-of-peace-attempts-and-failures-in-syria-21155.

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Another very large issue which has stemmed from the war is the large number of refugees and IDPs. Both of these should be touched upon and included in the final solution. This can be regarding, aid or the distribution of refugees amongst various nations. See link below:

- <https://www.statista.com/statistics/740233/major-syrian-refugee-hosting-countries-worldwide/>

then of course the actual ending of the war should be addressed in regard to how different groups will be accounted for (e.g ISIL) and what compromises or agreements must be reached in order to progress after war between the Syrian government and people as well as the other nations which were involved. This should aim to be more than simply “recognizing” the issue but actually acting on the information in order to bring an end to the conflict.

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Further reading

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<https://www.cfr.org/article/syrias-civil-war>

https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/SY_120630_Final%20Communique%20of%20the%20Action%20Group%20for%20Syria.pdf

<https://news.un.org/en/focus/syria>

Appendices

Appendix A

https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/SY_120630_Final%20Communique%20of%20the%20Action%20Group%20for%20Syria.pdf