

**Committee/Council: Security Council****Issue: The Situation in Syria****Student Officer: Danae E. Zolota****Position: Deputy President****Introduction**

Having lasted more than five years now, and with estimates of more than 400.000 casualties and 11 million displaced people, according to the UN, the Syrian civil war is justifiably considered the biggest humanitarian crisis since the Second World War. What complicates the situation considerably is the involvement of various groups and countries in the conflict, not all of whom have the same aims.

The conflict is rooted in March 2011, in the arrest and torture of some students who sprayed with graffiti their school's wall, stating that the government needed to be changed. This happened in a time of wild unrest in the general region of the Middle East, following what would later be called the "Arab Spring". Demonstrators flooded the streets demanding reforms to the government, which had failed to keep its promises and prove better than its predecessor. After a while, at some undefinable point, the peaceful protests, which had been met with police brutality and interventions of the army, turned into a full-fledged rebellion, along with the creation of a rebel army, which consisted of soldiers who previously belonged to the Syrian militia. The rebels demanded the resignation of the head of state, Mr. Bashar Al-Assad, along with major reforms in the government. However, the two sides did not fight unsupported. International forces aligned themselves with one of the two, and the Assad-administration found itself supported by Iran, the Russian Federation, as well as the Lebanese Shia Islamist Hezbollah movement. On the other hand, the rebel forces enjoyed the support of the US, the EU and multiple Arab Gulf states, like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan, as well as Turkish alignment.

Along with that, however, about one year after the beginning of the conflict, in 2012, a new threat started emerging, namely that of jihadist terrorist group Al Nusra Front



(later renamed Jabhat Fatah al-Sham), which is an Al-Qaeda affiliated organization with the aim of establishing an Islamic State in Syria. As well as this group, the Syrian conflict marks the uprising of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which managed to seize a big part of eastern Syria, around the Euphrates region. A joint effort by the US and the Kurdish group YPG (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel or the "People's Protection Units" in English) is being held to combat ISIL, however a number of civilian casualties throughout this conflict are high as well, caused both by the western forces, but also ISIL's ruthless, and more difficult to defeat, tactics, which do not even take into account the lives of civilians.

What needs to be taken into consideration as well, upon examining the situation in Syria, is the impact of the humanitarian crisis to the rest of the world, which actually led to the refugee crisis that has overrun Europe. Furthermore, civilian lives are in grave danger not only because of the bullets of the civil war but also because of the lack of nourishment, medication, accommodation and further crucial points.

## Definition of Key-Terms

### Arab Spring

The Arab Spring is a term popularized by the West and it refers to a series of uprisings and armed, even, rebellions against governments throughout countries in the Middle East and North Africa. It started in early 2011 and affected countries such as Tunisia (where it all began and quickly spread out), Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, and Syria. It showed little positive results, since it mostly caused violence and ongoing conflict, without major democratic reforms.

### Conflict-Induced Displacement

Conflict-induced displacement is a type of forced migration and refers to the enforced fleeing from a country due to the endangerment of an individual's life. There are different kinds of people who experience this kind of situation, namely: refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced people. It has been estimated by the UNHCR that the total of displaced people in Syria reaches half of its population, namely 11 million, out of which 5 million Syrians have fled to another country and 6.3 million people are displaced internally.

The receiving countries of this refugee wave are mostly the ones in the west, so Turkey and European countries. The European Union struggles in its effort to deal with what has come to be known as the refugee crisis, even with pre-existing legislation in place, namely laws and conventions stemming from the 1951 Geneva

Convention on the protection of refugees, such as the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), the European Refugee Fund, the Temporary Protection Directive and the Policy Plan on Asylum. Legislation keep being revisited and improved in accordance to the circumstances, as well as deals are being made (such as that between the EU and Turkey concerning the repatriation of part of the displaced people), so that generally the EU has an exceptionally welcoming and refugee-friendly policy. Nevertheless, a few countries refuse or fail to follow such regulations, a phenomenon which will be revisited later on.

### Civil War

A civil war refers to a conflict between two or more groups that all belong to the same nation.

### Proxy war

Proxy wars refer to conflicts, in which third party groups or nations fight each other in the actual interest of other, powerful countries. It is a technique most commonly used by considerable forces, because it does not actually involve the major forces themselves, however, the clash between them is imminent and carried out by other actors.

### Chemical weapons

According to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), chemical weapons are defined as follows: “The term chemical weapon is applied to any toxic chemical or its precursor that can cause death, injury, temporary incapacitation or sensory irritation through its chemical action. Munitions or other delivery devices designed to deliver chemical weapons, whether filled or unfilled, are also considered weapons themselves”.<sup>1</sup>

### Hezbollah movement

The Hezbollah movement is a Shi’ite movement, initially making its appearance in Lebanon as a way of facing Israeli forces, and with the aim of establishing an Islamic State in the region. The Hezbollah found themselves in a difficult position after the Arab Spring, especially because of the threat of one of their key allies, Bashar al Assad. Thus they vowed to fight at the de jure Syrian government’s side until the defeat of the rebels.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.opcw.org/about-chemical-weapons/what-is-a-chemical-weapon/>

## YPG

The YPG, also known as the People's Protection Party, is a socialist democratic Kurdish organization that acts in the territory of Syrian Kurdistan, Rojava. Its purpose is to fight ISIS and it is composed not only by Kurds, but anyone who is willing to support this cause, men, women, Syrians, Armenians, Christians and many more. It is a force to be reckoned with, its first great victory and sign of its increasing power being the Kobane siege of 2014, during which they managed to defeat ISIS and bring global attention upon themselves. On the other hand, it is a force second-guessed by many due to it being a Kurdish alliance.

## Background Information

### Before the Arab Spring

Before World War II, Syria was a state under French governance. In 1946, it was led to full independence by its newly elected president Shukri al-Kuwatli, the first Syrian president. During the period from 1949 to 1954, Syria was tormented by various, repeated coups.



In 1955, Kuwatli returned to power and decided to seek out stronger ties with Egypt. This led to the formation of the United Arab Republic, a joint state of Egypt and Syria. However, Egypt did not allow any Syrian participation in the governance, and the alliance did not last long; a coup in 1961 recalled Syria to its previous independent state, resolving the union.

Conflicts with Israel followed, in which Syria continued to form alliances with Egypt, in order to fend off Israeli forces. Meanwhile, in 1970, Hafez al-Assad seized power and ruled with an iron fist until his death in 2000, at which point his son, Bashar al-Assad took over. The history of Syria, even before the uprising of the conflict is rich in coups and unrest, mainly because of the failures of the government, which led to a socioeconomic crisis. It is worth mentioning that the uprisings in Syria in 2011 followed the worst drought of modern human history (2006-2010). As well as failing to provide for its population satisfyingly, the Assad regime also followed a very strict and pervasive policy, with extended censorship and surveillance, as well as brutal answers to any sign of views opposing the government.

### Uprisings start in 2011

As previously mentioned, the protests against the government were a result of the dissatisfaction of the people due to the socioeconomic crisis caused by the drought,

combined with the general upheaval of the Arab Spring and with the triggering event of the torture of the students who made the anti-government graffiti.

In March 2011, protests erupted in Dar'a, a rural region in south Syria, and slowly spread throughout the country. It was met by brutal police and army interventions and resulted in the death of several protesters.

It is clear that part of the protests was due to the fact that the Assad government is aligned with the Alawites' ideology, whereas the majority of the Syrian population is Sunni, a different branch of Islam.

At first, there were no major disadvantages for Sunni people in Syria, however, as an answer to the rebellious protests, Assad started demonizing them, by referring to them as "Islamist groups" and propagandizing against them.

In September 2011, the Free Syrian Army was created, namely a rebel army that consisted of defectors of the Syrian military.

### Opposition

At first, the opposition consisted of the Syrian National Council (SNC), however, due to internal conflict, it was soon clear that the SNC was not a competent leader of the opposition. Thus, a new coalition was formed; the "National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces", which was recognized by many countries internationally as the representation of Syrian people. However, even that was not close to devoid of internal conflict. Still, the rebel forces managed to take hold of a significant percent of the northern region, as well as seized Aleppo, 2<sup>nd</sup> largest city of Syria, on July 2012.

### International forces

The intervention of international forces became publicly more prominent by the end of 2012 and 2013 when Arab League states started arming rebels. Although the US remained less involved in arming the rebel armies, out of fear of feeding jihadist groups by accident, they did set up training courses for 5,000 soldiers.

On the other hand, the government received support from Russia and Iran, in the form of funding and armory, as well as Hezbollah soldiers, who fight for the Syrian government.

In 2015, the Russian army made its first air strikes, supposedly against ISIL, however, it soon became clear that the missiles were aimed towards rebel forces. In September 2016, Russian and Syrian forces bombed the city of Aleppo, without

taking into consideration civilian casualties, managing thus to retake control of the city, in one of the bloodiest attacks, that was condemned by human rights groups.

The first direct assault by the US against the Syrian government forces was done in April 2017, when cruise missiles were fired into Syria, as “retaliation” for the attack against civilians made by the government with chemical weapons.

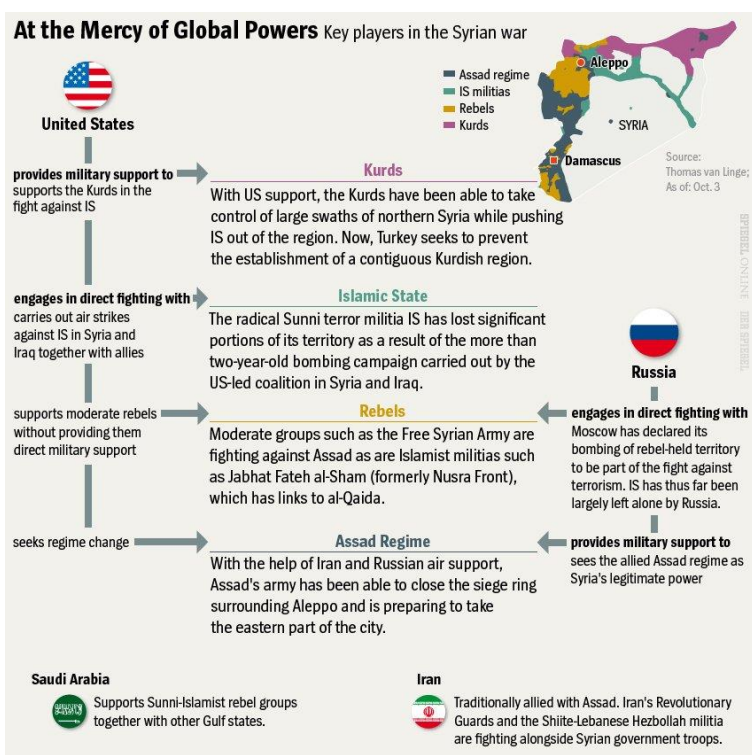
Chemical weapons

One of the major offenses during the Syrian civil war is the use of chemical weapons, which were also used against civilians.

In August 2013, there was an attack in Damascus, during which use of chemical weapons was confirmed, however without enough evidence to be able to tell which side they were used.

The following September, the Security Council demanded the destruction of the chemical weapons stockpile in Syria, an order binding, which would have been enforced by any means, where the Syrian government not to comply, which, of course, did.

In October, Syria signed the Chemical Weapons Convention, which, in short, forbids countries from producing, stockpiling or using chemical weapons. Nevertheless, the use of chemical weapons did not cease afterward in Syria, seeing as the most recent reports of such weaponry used in the conflict was in the rebel-held town of Khan Sheikhoun in Kurds north-western Syria on 4<sup>th</sup> of April 2017.



**Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

Lebanon / Hezbollah

Lebanon and Syria have a longstanding, often common, history. At first, Lebanon was part of Syria, before claiming its independence. However, following Lebanon's multiple conflicts against Israel, the Syrian military has been present in Lebanon until 2005.



The Hezbollah itself, as an organization, was established to fend off Israeli forces. It is a group militaristic, strict and vicious and has been named as a terrorist organization by multiple countries, including the US. However, the Hezbollah also has shown the ability to provide for the people of Lebanon, which is the reason for the lack of upheavals against it in Lebanon.

Hezbollah soldiers fight in the civil war as a support to Assad's administration, because of their common affiliation with the Shia branch of Islam, as well as their fear that without Assad's resistance against Israel, the latter will have a much easier job pursuing Lebanese regions.

### United States of America - Russia

The US's main aim in Syria is not the support of the rebels, although they are positively predisposed towards and they offer them support. On the contrary, the US has as its main goal to continue the War on Terror and eliminate ISIL forces. For that, they cooperate with the Kurdish YPG and continue to bomb Syrian regions.

On the other hand, Syria has a strategic position in the Middle East, which could be beneficial to its allies, and seeing as Syria has until now always supported Russia, a change of regime would mean an exchange in power.

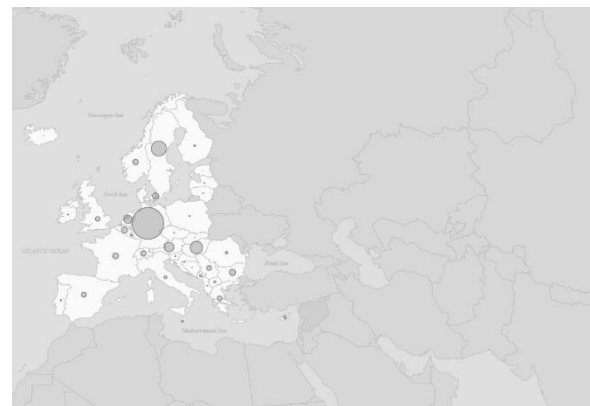
Last but not least, knocking in the Assad regime would hopefully establish a different ideology, more democratic, with a free market and morals closer to the western, which would slowly steer Syria away from socialist influences, with first and foremost that of Russia.

Russia, of course, wants to maintain its power over Syria, which is also its only access to the Mediterranean and a valuable ally in the Middle East. Operations of that kind made by the US were never really welcome, as seen even before Putin's presidency by the reaction of the previous president against, for example, the NATO's airstrikes in Yugoslavia.

### European Union

The European Union is a supporter of the rebels, with greatest examples the UK and France, who have a very active role in the efforts to find a solution to the Syrian situation. However, the greatest role the EU plays in the situation in Syria is that in the refugee crisis.

Countries like Germany and Austria play a major role in the resettlement of refugees from Syria and offer thus a small relief to the humanitarian crisis. If seen in numbers:



- Germany has pledged 43,431 places for Syrian refugees
- the remaining 27 EU countries have pledged around 51,205 places

However, not all EU countries seem keen on accepting refugees. Three countries, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, refuse to accept refugees due to supposed so-called "worsened security situation in Europe and dysfunctionality of the quota system" (Czech Prime Minister), and in views of not encouraging further people to refuge to Europe, as stated for example by the Polish government spokesman.

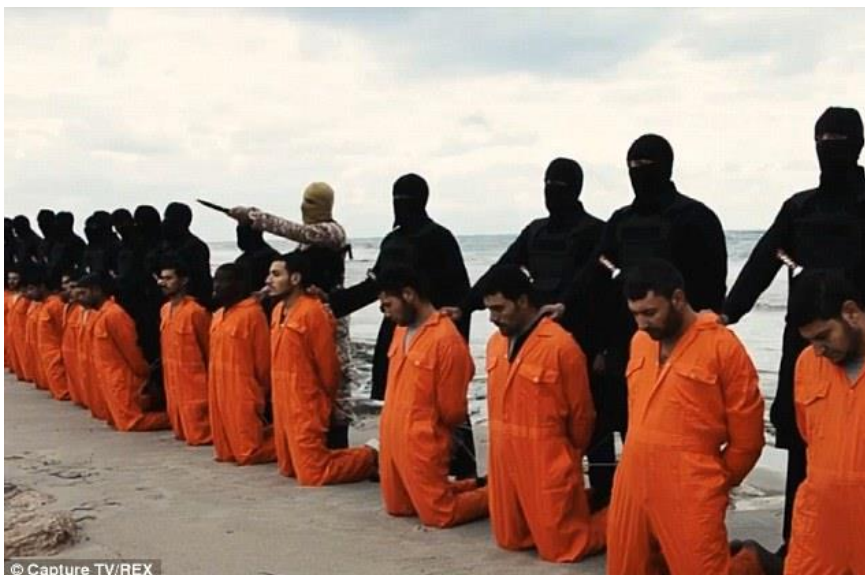
The EU, in response, sued the three previously mentioned countries, using thus the legal power of the European Commission for the first time concerning this matter. Seeing as such procedures take a considerable amount of time, this is no short-term solution to such negative responses.

### Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL / ISIS / Da'esh)

ISIS used to be part of the Al Qaeda, however, they were condemned for their violent methods. Even in later attempts of the organization to affiliate itself with Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, it was turned down.

The aim of ISIS is the establishment of an Islamic State, not only in the region of Syria but internationally, with the Sharia Law as government. The organization has many ways of attacking, like improvised explosive devices, suicide bombings and even access to much more advanced weaponry.

ISIS has managed to take hold of a significant part of eastern Syria, as well as Iraq, and it keeps training more people and expanding its reach. What facilitates their work is the failure of the states internationally to cease the war, which opens the doors to people who see ISIS as the last resort. As expressed by Majed, a 26-year-old civil society activist: "The disappointment caused by the West's inaction created a fertile recruiting ground for extremists, who told those who had lost their loved ones that they were their only hope"





## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
April 1946	Syria becomes an independent state
March 2011	First protests in Dar'a, after the graffiti incident
June 2012	Drafting of the Geneva Communiqué
November 11, 2012	Syrian Opposition formally agrees to rename itself and operate as National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces.
August 18, 2013	UN Inquisitor group arrives to look into the chemical weapons matter
October 31, 2013	Supposedly Syria announces that it destroyed all chemical weapons stockpiles
September 15, 2016	Civilian casualties due to airstrikes, Russia and the US accuse each other of breaking the ceasefire
May 20, 2015	ISIS takes control of Palmyra, ancient city with heavy cultural importance
July 7, 2017	After G20 meeting, presidents of the US and Russia agree to put ceasefire into action in southeastern Syria beginning on the 9 <sup>th</sup> of July from Damascus

## Relevant UN Treaties, Resolutions and Events

Resolutions:

- 2328: Demanding Access for Observation of Monitoring Civilian Evacuations from Aleppo, Syria
- 2043: Establishment of the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria
- 2139: Ensures humanitarian aid for Syria

- 2254: Endorsing Road Map for Peace Process in Syria, Setting Timetable for Talks

There have been also been further attempts to solve the Syrian situation like the Arab League monitoring and the Geneva Peace Talks on Syria in 2017.

### Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Previous attempts to solve the issue include the resolutions mentioned above, as well as some other resolutions of the UN Security Council, which aimed to condemn Syria but were vetoed by China and Russia.

Furthermore, there have been previous attempts at partial ceasefires, such as the ones mentioned below:

- (26 February–July 2016)
- (12 September – 20 September 2016)
- (December 2016–February 2017)
- (May 2017)(July 2017)

All of the attempts failed apart from the fourth (regarding a southwestern part of Syria), which was put into action after the talks between the Russian and US administrations in the G20 summit in July 2017, which until now has been proven fruitful in maintaining peace in that particular area in Syria, remaining however still very vulnerable, as the consequences of violation of this agreement are still not exactly clarified.

Another attempt at resolving the issue was also the 2012 Geneva Communiqué, which was drafted by various countries in cooperation with the Secretary General of the UN and the League of Arab States. It was supposed to set out to bring peace to Syria, while viewing manifold aspects of the issue, such as ending violence, but also making provisions for the transition of Syria and attending to human rights. Unfortunately, it was halted before going into action to increased violence and intensity of the civil war. Nevertheless, a review of a similar plan might be a plausible solution to the issue.

### Possible Solutions

The situation in Syria seems to be one of the unsolvable issues our world is facing nowadays. The sides involved in the conflict seem to be too immersed in their own selfish goals for any arrangement to actually work. The innocent civilians are being hit by multiple different directions; foreign forces, terrorist organizations, their own

government. The countries willing to take up refugees are not and should not be a permanent solution for all the people who fled their homes.

All over the world, politicians claim that only a political solution could bring an end to the Syrian civil war. It is true that there should be peace arrangements, which would ensure a compromise between the actors at hand, and the current attempt at a ceasefire is also quite a good opportunity to engage all parties to this conflict in a fruitful debate concerning a plan of action.

Furthermore, regulations should be set regarding the conflict. The international community needs to cooperate with organizations such as the OPCW (Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons), in order to ensure the implementation of important treaties. Civilian lives need to be prioritized, and in order for that to happen, the solution is either a peace arrangement or, for the time being, strict regulations regarding weapons that can and cannot be used, as well as perhaps an outlining of safe areas protected by the blue helmets.

The unforeseeable factor is, of course, groups such as ISIL, which is not willing to agree to any regulations. International cooperation, in order to combat these groups, combined with education for the people who might fall victims to the jihadist propaganda is quite a solid recipe, so as to face these groups. Moreover, one could attempt to hit the issue at its roots and hold investigations regarding the source of funding and weaponry for such organizations and shut down of those.

Last, but certainly not least, the solution to this topic should also focus on humanitarian relief and repatriation of displaced people. This can be done by joint national and international efforts, as well as national cooperation with the appropriate organizations that need funding and supplies. People should also be made aware of this topic, so as to hinder any kind of xenophobia people may harbor that could be a hindrance to offering the people in need whatever help can be given.

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