

Forum: United Nations Security Council

Issue: The Situation in Syria

Student Officer: Ayan Sule

Position: Deputy Chair

Introduction

The conflict in Syria is one that is extremely complex and has threatened stability in the middle east for a major part of the early 21st century. What makes this conflict extremely complex are its multiple warring factions combined with foreign intervention from multiple states. The vaguely defined relationship of the United States and its allies paired with major foreign policy transitions from the Obama administration to the Trump Administration have contributed to the increasingly bizarre nature of the conflict and the increasing uncertainty for any lasting peace in the region. Furthermore, the Syrian Government is accused by the international community of deploying chemical weapons on civilians and indiscriminately bombing civilian settlements; allegations which they have denied. Despite surmounting international sanctions against the Bashar al Assad Government, the government continues to violently crush any dissent in the region; and these oppressive actions have been supported by Iran and Russia. Iran has deployed Hezbollah, an Iran backed Lebanese militia, to support the Assad government in combating the anti-Assad militias. Syria has also become ground zero for a proxy war for Arab Gulf States in order to combat Iran's influence in the region.

Saudi Arabia has reportedly dispatched funding to anti-Assad militias in order to combat Iran's Shiite influence in the region. Like the Arab Gulf States, the United States is using Syria as a battleground for a proxy war against Russia. The United States has also reportedly funded, trained, and supplied arms to Kurdish militias in northern Syria in order to combat Putin-backed Syrian forces. The Kurdish militias have been extremely effective in reclaiming land from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)- an extremist militia group that has been designated as a

terrorist organization by an overwhelming majority of states from the international community.

However, Turkey feels threatened by the growing influence of the Kurdish Forces in northern Syria as the strength of these militias may incite Kurdish uprisings from the PKK within the Turkish border. Turkey, a strong US ally, is using its military to combat Kurdish forces and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been accused of carrying out a genocide against the Kurdish people. To gain an understanding of the current Syrian War, one must gain an understanding of Syria's history under the French during the colonial era and the relationship of a newly independent Syrian State with its surrounding states.

Key Terms

Arab Spring

The Arab Spring was a series of Anti-Government protests, uprisings and armed rebellions against oppressive regimes which took place in the Middle East and North Africa in 2010 and 2011. These uprisings started in Tunisia and spread to the rest of the Arab world. The hotspots for the Arab Spring protests were namely Yemen, Iran, Syria, Iraq, Syria and Egypt. These protests can be attributed to the spread of libertarian anti-Authoritarian ideologies that spread on social media during the time. These protests prompted heavy crackdown on behalf of ruling governments and a deployment of military forces in protest hotspots. International response to these protests have been varied, the western nations called for expanding civil liberties and human rights in these states. States like Eritrea went as far as blaming the United States for destabilizing the Middle East and North Africa and creating the conditions for protest.

Chemical Weapons

Chemical Weapon is a specialized ammunition that has been designed to cause intentional death or physiological harm through its toxic properties. It differs from biological weapons on the basis of the munition used. Biological weapons use pathogens and organisms to spread disease while chemical weapons use chemicals and chemical reactions to cause harm. The international community has combated the use of chemical weapons through the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

193 states have signed the CWC with only three states from the international community that has neither signed nor ratified the treaty. The three countries are Egypt, North Korea and South Sudan.

Jihadist

Jihadists refers to radical extremists that take up arms to further a religious Islamic cause. The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan is a famous example of Jihadists from all over the world taking up arms, travelling to Afghanistan, and helping the Afghans protect their religious land.

Militia

A militia is a military force that is run by the civilian population that often comprises of non-state actors.

Proxy War

A proxy war is a war that involves a major foreign power where the foreign power does not directly deploy its military in the war. Proxy wars are waged by the major powers providing covert funding, arms, training, etc to regional parties/actors.

Shia

Shias are a sect of the Muslim community that make up one-tenth of the world's Muslim population. It has ideological differences with Sunni Islam which is followed by Gulf States such as Saudi Arabia. Iran comprises the world's largest Shia community.

Key Issues

The Refugee Crisis

The Syrian Refugee Crisis comprises an exodus of 6.6 Million Syrians since 2011 with another 6.7 million Syrians that are driven from their homes but are trapped within Syria itself. Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon have offered refuge to Syrian refugees with Turkey alone having a 3.5 Million Syrian refugee population. The refugee crisis began in March 2011 when the government started to crackdown on anti-government peaceful protests with many families fleeing their homes. 60% of

Syrian refugees in other countries face poverty, unemployment, and poor living conditions. Furthermore, refugee camps are cramped with scarce resources, further accelerating the spread of the COVID-19. Russia and China had also previously vetoed a UN resolution that aimed at giving aid to Syrian Refugees within the Syrian border. Female refugees have also been sexually assaulted by various factions, most notably ISIL. Yazidi Syrian refugees are trafficked and forced into prostitution by traffickers that promise better life prospects at the northern border. The Sexual and Gender Based Violence program of the UN is chronically underfunded and is in dire need of a budget to protect Syrian women at the border.

Extremist Proxy Groups

Extremist Proxy Groups within Syrian borders are being funded by the United States, Iran and Saudi Arabia, increasing the instability in the region. Al Qaeda had also reportedly founded a new rebel branch in Syria called the Jabhat al Nusra in 2012. However, it was this internal rift between the Al Qaeda's factions in Syria that led to an internal fallout and the formation of ISIS. The Free Syria Army is also backed by the USA, UK, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey and the aforementioned parties have also provided arms and equipment to Syrian rebel groups. The aforementioned nations help in funding the Syrian democratic forces while also providing weapons to the same. Libyan Transitional Council and the Kosovo Liberation army have also dispatched troops to aid the FSA. The FSA comprises many jihadists recruited from Tunisia, Egypt, the Balkans, and Kuwait. However, the FSA has been criticized as an unviable fighting force due to the various factions under it. Many FSA members have also defected to al Nusra while others have defected to ISIS. The groups under the FSA lack a clear objective as their ideologies differ from being secular to right wing Islamists. Furthermore, they are classified as non-state actors which brings into question as to where FSA members that commit war crimes should be prosecuted. The US funding during the Trump administration has marked a reduced combat on behalf of the rebels towards the Syrian Government, and an increased coordinated effort from the rebels and the Kurds to combat ISIS, which has resulted in a considerable decrease in ISIS strongholds and territories in the region.

Iran has also dispatched Hezbollah to aid the Russian and Syrian Government in combating the FSA. Furthermore, Russia has also directly intervened in Syria by carrying out air strikes against FSA and rebel strongholds. The existence of various warring non-state factions in Syria such as ISIS, FSA, YPG and Hezbollah has promoted an increased instability in the region. One must also keep in mind the situation in Afghanistan in the 1990s where previously US backed warlords and militias had constant disagreements after the Soviet threat was deterred, and these disagreements between US backed factions led to a civil war in Afghanistan that was fought with both sides utilizing US supplied weapons. This must be prevented in the case of Syria.

Legitimacy of the Syrian State

The US, Britain, France, Turkey, and Gulf States formally recognized the Syrian National Council as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. It is currently recognized by 27 member states in the UN. The Assad Government, however, does not meet the requirements outlined in the 1933 Montevideo Convention for a state to be considered sovereign and legitimate. According to the convention, a sovereign state should have:

- A Permanent Population
- A defined territory and borders
- An Effective Government

Furthermore, the Assad Government governing the Syrian Arab Republic is recognized by 33+ UN Member states.

Turkish Intervention

In January 2018, the Turkish Government launched an assault on northern Syria in order to oust the Kurdish forces. This move came after Donald Trump's announcement to withdraw troops from Syria. This left the Kurdish forces and the Kurdish population unprotected from Turkish assaults. One must note that Turkey is a key US ally in the Syria conflict and has also been providing aid to the Free Syria

Army. However, Turkey is carrying out attacks against the Kurds as it views the Turkish PKK as an extremist group and believes that the YPG's stronghold on captured ISIS territory will only empower the PKK to conduct attacks against the Turkish Government. Turkish intelligence has also armed militants that have later gone onward to join ISIS. It is also important to note that in a Turkish Bombing campaign initiated by Turkey in 2018, Turkey only bombed North Syrian Kurdish Territories and not ISIS territories in the same region.

WMDs

The Syrian Government has been accused of using Chemical Weapons on innocent civilians and has been complicit in indiscriminately bombing civilians settlements. In August 2013, the Assad Government bombed two opposition-controlled areas in Ghouta with missiles containing the Sarin Gas. Russia and Syria denied the allegations saying that the chemical weapons belonged to the opposition party in Syria. After a UN report had revealed that the Syrian Military had, in fact, used the sarin gas on civilians in the Ghouta bombing, the United States threatened military invasion in retaliation. However, a US-Russia negotiated deal resulted in the aversion of military action and outlined that Syria must destroy its chemical weapons stockpile (UNSC Resolution 2118). Syria also acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and agreed to destroy its stockpile in 2013. Another Chemical Weapons attack had occurred in Douma in 2018. The Western Bloc and the Gulf States have blamed the Syrian Government for this chemical weapons attack. However, the Syrian Government denied all allegations.

ISIS Prisoners

Although the ISIS area of influence has been largely reduced by United States and Kurdish forces, captured ISIS militants were sent to makeshift prisons in Kurdish territory. After an abrupt troop withdrawal from Syria was announced by President Trump in 2018, ISIS prisoners were left unguarded and Kurdish forces could not keep all prisoners from escaping. The United States suggested that the ISIS prisoners be repatriated to their home countries and be prosecuted there itself.

However, the home countries of the militants were not willing to accept and prosecute the ISIS prisoners. Kurdish regions are currently in dire need of prison reform and protection from ISIS prisoners that are at a higher chance of escaping.

Major Parties Involved

Russia

Russia is a key P5 ally of the Assad Government. Russia owns a naval facility on the Syrian port of Tartous, which is its only base in the Mediterranean Sea. They have also supplied weapons to the Syrian Government and have also vetoed UN Resolutions that aimed at taking significant action against the Assad Government. Russia also announced that they were conducting air strikes against the Islamic State and Terrorist Groups. However, they ended up bombing western-backed militias in the air raid. Russia continues to provide strong military and financial support to the Assad Government and has helped the Assad Government fight rebel groups. President Putin has made previous statements suggesting that the only way to reach a lasting peace in the region is through a political and diplomatic settlement.

United States

The US Government has backed and trained and armed at least 5000 rebel militia and Kurdish troops to combat the Assad regime. Although President Trump did announce a withdrawal of troops in 2018 and 2019, he has reversed his decision both times. US Generals in the region have said that they have received no direct orders or an end date to withdraw troops. Currently, US troops are stationed to protect oil fields in northern Kurdish provinces. The United States also conducted raids in Syria which resulted in the death of ISIS leader Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi. The US also regularly conducts airstrikes against ISIS controlled regions and is currently searching for Hashemi al Qureshi, Baghdadi's successor, in the region.

Turkey

In January 2018, the Turkish Government launched an assault on northern Syria in order to oust the Kurdish forces. This move came after Donald Trump's announcement to withdraw troops from Syria. This left the Kurdish forces and the Kurdish population unprotected from Turkish assaults. One must note that Turkey is a key US ally in the Syria conflict and has also been providing aid to the Free Syria Army. However, Turkey is carrying out attacks against the Kurds as it views the Turkish PKK as an extremist group and believes that the YPG's stronghold on captured ISIS territory will only empower the PKK to conduct attacks against the Turkish Government. Turkish intelligence has also armed militants that have later gone onward to join ISIS. It is also important to note that in a Turkish Bombing campaign initiated by Turkey in 2018, Turkey only bombed North Syrian Kurdish Territories and not ISIS territories in the same region.

Saudi Arabia

The Sunni ruled kingdom has called for an ousting of President Assad and placing the government in the hands of Saudi backed Syrian National Council. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has provided major military and financial assistance to rebel groups in the region, including those with Islamist ideologies. However, they have also been involved in Bombing raids against the Islamic State.

Iran

Iran supports the Shiite Assad government and has repeatedly acted in support of the Assad government to bolster the government's hold on the region. Iran is Syria's strongest Arab ally in the region. Iran has been instrumental in Hezbollah's deployment in the region and several Iranian and Iraqi militants fighting alongside Syrian pro-Assad forces have stated that they are protecting Islamic holy sites in Syria. Iran was also involved in Syria peace talks in Vienna and are supportive of a peaceful transition in Syria through multi-party elections.

Israel

Israel and Syria are regional rivals and Israel has reportedly conducted air strikes against Syrian nuclear facilities in 2007. An IAEA nuclear watchdog later reported to the United Nations Security Council that the 2007 Israeli air raid had destroyed Syria's nuclear program and had curbed Syria's plan to create a possible nuclear bomb. In 2013, Syria accused Israel of bombing an air facility in Damascus, the bombed region was suspected by various western intelligence agencies to house the Hezbollah assembling its anti-aircraft missiles that were meant for Lebanon. Syria also captured Israeli held territory in 2018 where the Syrian Army marched to the south border and pushed further. More recently, Israel has bombed a Syrian military outpost on 4th August 2020 and has caught Syrians breaching Israeli sovereignty and entering Golan Heights. Israel states that 4 Syrian individuals were allegedly installing bombs in Golan Heights. American representatives for the army have said that it is too soon to comment on the allegiance of the individuals caught installing bombs in Golan Heights, however Israel states that they were government representatives.

Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

The SDF is a Kurdish led militant force consisting of an alliance between YPG and several other militias to combat the Islamic State and Al Qaeda backed forces. They have also been involved in combating Government troops and have received assistance from Syrian Government's ex-military members who defected to help the rebel cause. The SDF is supported by the US and the US provides strategic aid, funding and weaponry to the SDF. However, the SDF is considered disorganized as it lacks a clear goal and comprises several factions with varying intentions.

The Kurds

The Kurds are an ethnic minority residing in border regions of Syria, Iraq and Turkey. Although they were promised an autonomous ethnically dominant Kurdish state by the British after the first world war, the idea of Kurdistan would not come to fruition due to internal strife between Kurdish leaders at the time. The Kurds have now formed the YPG and the PKK in Turkey, Iraq and Syria and aim at reaching

their goal of an independent Kurdish state. The YPG has been active in combating ISIS and has been effective in doing so. Currently, the Kurdish region is rich for its oil reserves and the USA aims to ally with the Kurdish political parties in order to transact the oil in the region. The PKK has also reportedly aided the YPG in the past in combating ISIS. In 2014, a Kurdish party (PYD) in Turkey declared autonomous zones in Afrin, Kobane and Jazira; and in 2016, they established a federal system in Arab and Turkmen regions captured from the Islamic State. This claim was rejected by Syrian Arab Republic and the Syrian Opposition. However, the region of Kurdistan meets the requirements outlined in the 1933 Montevideo Convention:

According to the convention, a sovereign state should have:

- A Permanent Population
- A defined territory and borders
- An Effective Government

The PKK is a militant and political organization based in ethnically Kurdish regions of Turkey and Iraq. The PKK's main objective is to gain independence from Turkey and form its own separate autonomous Kurdish state with its territory consisting of ethnically Kurdish regions in Northern Syria, Turkey, and Iraq. They are currently classified as a terrorist organization in Turkey.

People's Protection Units (YPG) is a militant group in Northern Syria which is funded by the US and comprises majority ethnic Kurds. They are also currently engaged in an armed conflict with ISIS and Turkey.

[The Islamic State](#)

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (aka Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant; abbr. ISIL) is a non-state UN designated terror group. It is accused by the UN of crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes. ISIS had originally pledged allegiance to the Al Qaeda militancy in 1999 and participated in the Iraqi insurgency in 2003 after the US invasion of Iraq. In 2014, ISIS established a caliphate after capturing areas of Iraq and Syria. It proclaimed religious authority over all religions worldwide. It was also denounced by the UN and several other world governments. With respect to the Syrian war, ISIS is known to combat both- The Syrian

Government and the opposition militias. After a US intervention in ISIS regions and several airstrikes and bombing raids were conducted on ISIS strongholds, the area of influence of ISIS significantly reduced. ISIS has lost their last significant territories to Syrian Democratic Forces and the Government of Iraq. ISIS leader Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi was killed in a US special forces raid, leaving the group significantly weakened.

Timeline

Date	Description	Outcome
1920	French occupying power divides Syria into three areas and separates Lebanon from Syria entirely	Mass protests take place in Syria
1928	Elections are held for the Syrian Constituent Assembly which drafts the constitution.	The French reject the constitution entirely.
1941	General De Gaulle from the French free troops vowed to end French rule in the region.	Shukri Al Kuwatli is elected as president of Syria and leads the country to independence three years later.
1958	Kuwatli returns to power and Syria and Egypt agree to form one nation- United Arab Republic. The republic was headed by Gamal Abdel Nasser.	The UAR calls for dissolution of all political parties, which leads to the Ba'ath party being dissolved.
1961	Discontent with the UAR, Syrian Army officers march into Damascus and seize power.	The UAR is dissolved.
1963	Ba'ath Officers seize power	Hafez al Assad becomes Defense Minister.
1967	Israel seizes Golan heights from Syria in the Six Day War.	Syria's military strength is depleted.

1970	In an internal coup within the Ba'athist party, Hafez al Assad seized power and imprisoned ex-President Salah Jadid.	President Assad passes army reforms which results in protests across Syria.
1973	Syria and Egypt go to war with Israel (again) but fail to retake Golan Heights.	Assad says he's willing to make peace with Israel.
1976	The Syrian army intervenes in Lebanon and supports the Christian Maronite Forces.	No significant outcome
1980	Islamic revolution takes place and the Iraq-Iran war occurs.	Syria supports Iran. However, the Islamic Revolution instigates uprisings in Aleppo, Homs and Hama.
1982	Muslim Brotherhood uprising in Hama is brutally suppressed by Syrian Army.	Tens of Thousands of civilians are killed.
1982	Israel invades Lebanon	Syrian forces are forced to withdraw from Lebanon.
1983	Lebanon and Israel announce end of hostilities	Not all Syrian forces withdraw from Lebanon.
1987	Syria invades Lebanon to enforce a ceasefire in Beirut.	
1990	Iraq invades Kuwait	Syria joins the US-led coalition against Iraq.
2000	President Assad dies.	He is succeeded by his son, Bashar Al Assad.
2000(Nov)	Bashar Al Assad announces release of 600 political prisoners.	Muslim Brotherhood resumes political activity.
2001	World Trade Center falls and US begins War on Terror.	Syria is classified as a state sanctioning terrorist entity by the US, Economic sanctions enforced on Syria in 2004.
2007	Israel carries out air strikes against nuclear facilities in Syria.	The Nuclear Program is destroyed.

2010	The US says that Syria provided Hezbollah with Scud missiles, which violates UN sanctions.	The US adopts stricter sanctions against Syria.
2011	Anti Regime protests take place in Syria (Arab Spring). Government retaliates by sending in Tanks into Dera, Banyas and Homs.	US and EU tighten sanctions.
2012	Syria shoots down Turkish plane	Turkey threatens military action if Syrian troops approach the Turkish borders.
2012 (Nov)	National Coalition formed in Qatar, excludes Islamist militias.	The US, Britain, France and Turkey recognize the National Coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people.
2013	The UN reveals that Syrian Government used Chemical Weapons against civilians.	Syrian Government agrees to destroy their chemical arsenal.
2014	Islamist rebels sieze bases of western backed Free Syria Army.	ISIS establishes a caliphate in Aleppo.
2015	Russia carries out air strikes in Syria, saying they would bomb ISIS bases.	Western Backed militias were overwhelmingly targeted in Russian air strikes. Aleppo is restored as a Syrian Government Stronghold.
2017 (Jan)	Diplomatic talks take place between Russia, Iran, Turkey, Syria and non Islamist rebels in Kazakhstan.	A ceasefire is agreed upon.
2017 (April)	US orders missile attack on Syrian Airbase.	Airbase is destroyed.
2017 (May)	US decides to arm YPG	Tabqa dam is captured from the IS due a strengthened Kurdish army.
2017 (June)	Syrian jet allegedly dropped bombs near an SDF base.	US shoots down Syrian jet.
2017 (July)	Syria and Hezbollah launch a joint operation against jihadist strongholds.	ISIS retreats from Raqqa, its de-facto capital.
2018 (Jan)	Turkey launches attack on Kurds in Northern Syria.	

2018 (April)	New claims of a chemical attack in Ghouta arise	US, Britain and France carry out strikes on Syrian targets.
2018 (July)	Syria reclaims large swaths of land in South Syria, bordering Israel, and Jordan.	
2018 (Sep-Dec)	Kurdish offensive reduces ISIS influence on a tiny region on the border.	
2019 (Oct)	US withdraws from Syria	Turkey attacks US allied Kurdish forces.
2019 (Oct)	US raids ISIS stronghold	Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi was declared dead.
2020 (March)	Turkey sends troops into Syria to stop Syrian army from retaking Idlib.	
2020 (June)	Growing economic hardships in the COVID-19 era prompts protests.	Assad sacks Syria PM Imad Khamis.

Possible Solutions

- 1) **Deradicalization Camps:** One possible solution to maintain stability in the region is by establishing UNESCO deradicalization re-education camps in the region that aim at deradicalizing the Youth from ISIS indoctrination.
- 2) **No fly Zone-** A no fly zone is one which is imposed over the airspace of a nation. Violation of a no-fly zone will result in any aircraft in the region from being shot down. These no-fly zones ensure that conflicts do not escalate by the use of aerial assaults and the conflicts are restricted to just the ground.
- 3) **Refugee Camps-** Although a proposal to establish aid to refugees was vetoed by Russia and China. The recent developments during the COVID virus can prompt a reconsideration of those measures with an increased number of budget and personnel being allocated to these camps.
- 4) **Immigration Centers in Turkey and Iraq-** Increased funding for immigration centres at the Syrian border will ensure a faster immigration process for

Syrians rather than having to wait in long lines. These immigration centres and refugee camps can also offer employment opportunities to Syrian refugees.

- 5) **Kurdish Referendum-** A referendum can be held in the regions of Turkish, Iraqi and Syrian Kurdistan to help decide on the general opinion of the people in the region. One must note that a referendum is non-binding and that government's mustn't follow the results of referendums. This may also be used to decide later as for whether the Kurds be given a separate state. One must keep in mind that referendums should be decided upon diplomatically as some states view UN imposition of a referendum as a violation of their sovereignty.
- 6) **Crackdowns on Terrorist Financiering-** Non state extremist groups in the region are being funded through means such as shell companies and bitcoin. Precedence suggests that strict regulation against bitcoin has led the value of bitcoin to drop. A coordinated regulation against the currency can render the currency worthless and can cut off one major arm in terrorism financiering. Economic sanctions can also be levied on certain nations to curb state funded terrorism. There are also internet black market deep web economies which provide covert means for terrorists to exchange and barter services worldwide. An infamous example of a deep web economy is the Silk Road.

Bibliography

"Syria Profile - Timeline." *BBC News*, BBC, 14 Jan. 2019, www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703995.

Seligman, Lara. "No 'End Date' for U.S. Troops in Syria." *Foreign Policy*, 25 Nov. 2019, foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/25/no-end-date-for-u-s-troops-in-syria/.

"Who Are the Kurds?" *BBC News*, BBC, 15 Oct. 2019, www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29702440.

Pamuk, Humeyra. "Exclusive: Turkish Intelligence Helped Ship Arms to Syrian Islamist Rebel Areas." *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, 21 May 2015,

www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-turkey-arms/exclusive-turkish-intelligence-helped-ship-arms-to-syrian-islamist-rebel-areas-idUSKBN0O61L220150521.

Nichols, Michelle. "Russia, Backed by China, Casts 14th U.N. Veto on Syria to Block Cross-Border Aid." *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, 20 Dec. 2019, www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-security-un/russia-backed-by-china-casts-14th-u-n-veto-on-syria-to-block-cross-border-aid-idUSKBN1YO23V.