

Forum: The Arab League in English

Issue: The question of the ongoing Syrian Civil War

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Introduction

The Syrian Civil War is a current violent struggle in Syria amongst pro-democratic revolutionaries and Syria's long-standing dynastic rule of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The Syrian Civil war was a direct cause of proxy warfare throughout the Middle East due to the Sunni-Shia and historical conflicts amongst countries between Iran, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. As the years progressed, the conflict expanded to tie the major power of the West and East - the United States of America and the Russian Federation. Old ties and demands of autonomy by the Kurds with the land that was in Iraq and modern-day Turkey have seeped in, leading to a growth of armed conflicts amongst 5 separate parties in the regions - Syrian Government, Syrian Rebels, Kurds, the Hezbollah coalition, Al-Qaeda, and the Islamic States of the Levant (Syria and Iraq) (ISIL/ISIS). All this amounts to not only the current generation of Syrians to be at risk and forced to withstand critical conditions but the next generation, who are now being born in wartime, and the generation after them to be at risk as well.

The Syrian Civil War stems from two different aspects: the Arab Spring and the dictatorship of the Assads.

The Arab Spring was a wave of pro-democracy rallies and revolutions across the Middle East and North Africa that began in 2010 and 2011 and challenged some of the region's entrenched authoritarian regimes. Protests in Tunisia and Egypt toppled their respective administrations in quick succession, encouraging similar attempts in other Arab countries. However, not every country found success in the protest movement, as protestors voicing political and economic grievances were frequently confronted with brutal crackdowns by their own security forces. This movement, in 2011, was slowly approaching Syria and was potentially placing Assad's regime at risk. So far, at that point in time, it had toppled president Ali Abdullah Saleh's administration in Yemen and Muammar al-Qaddafi's administration in Libya.

Secondly, the Assad family in Syria, starting from Hafez al-Assad, was the essence of a true dictatorship. Similar to the one under Stalin, there was large industrialisation progress in Syria and immense improvements in the basic quality of many. However, aspects such as freedom of speech and freedom of the press were not allowed and were highly preventive, directly akin to the policies of industrialization that Stalin invoked. After the death of Hafez al-Assad and his first son Bassel, Bashar al-Assad took control over the nation. He worked to revoke many of the cruel mechanisms of control that his father had imposed on his people, and, before the Arab Spring, there was an acceptance of the leadership of Syria amongst a growing population of Syrians. Even during the beginning of the revolt, Bashar began working to appease not only the public but the rebels as well by implementing schemes and modifying legislation that people hated for decades. Though, it was only until he realized that this policy was ineffective was when he began to mobilize the army and began his revolts against his own people. This is what spilled into the conflict we know today, one where there are human humanitarian crises, massive casualties and a war that never seems to completely end.

Additionally, factors such as the uneven economy, population surge, and drought were the subsidiary causes for the issue. The uneven economy, heavily weighed on private corporations, favored the upper echelons of the wealthy and left the middle classes to work to ensure food for their families. The Syrian government was not equipped for the population surge, consisting of a large youth population, which caused a sputtering economy and a shortage of food and jobs - repeating the cycle of poverty. The drought meant that there was a mass shortage of water in Syria, which was a resource that was used to power the agriculture industry (the primary sector fed the lower echelons of wealth).

The Syrian Civil War has, in status quo, involved countries across the world - with the war developing into a proxy war. Syria becomes a point of clash between the USA against Russia and China (through UNSC voting records), as well as a point of clash between the Irans and the Saudis (each of them being backed by the USA and Russia respectively). The creation of rebel groups and non-state actors that function with their own autonomy through the proxy war, such as al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Hezbollah's regime.

Till date, the vast majority of action to resolve the issue has been by the western hemisphere and through UN working bodies. However, the war itself has not been addressed effectively as the war is an internal affair which, in theory, is outside the

jurisdiction of the UN according to the UN Charter and the Rome Statute. Though, humanitarian issues are being tackled by UNICEF and Red Cross, which work as a collective to ensure that the civilians of Syria are safe - a difficult task as the war is against the general public and hence militia cannot be separated from civilians. In practice, the most effective solutions will be negotiations with select, critical parties that are involved in the war, such as Russia, Iran and Kuridstan. In general, solutions that regard the United States and Russia seizing the war will be the most effective yet the most complicated considering their foreign policies that involve not conceding towards each other in war. Furthermore, they are funders of Saudi Arabia and Iran respectively, who respectively fund the Rebel groups and the Assad government, which they will halt funds towards only if the USA and Russia halt their funding.

Note from the Chairperson:

The chairperson understands that the agenda is the current state of the Syrian Civil War, though they have structured it so that the research report provides details about the war as a whole to entice delegates to detail about facts, details and information that is pertinent to the current state of affairs. The chairperson understands that this research report is significantly longer than ones that most delegates will be comfortable with, however, owing to the depth of the issue and the sheer research required the chairperson believes that it is in the best interest to provide this information to every delegate. The chairperson strongly encourages delegates to research significantly further into the agenda as the background guide does not give adequately into all the issues that are part of the war and not merely their country's stance on the war as a whole due to the sheer size of the issue.

Definition of Key Terms

Proxy Warfare - a war instigated by a major power which does not itself become involved.

Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) - a doctrine of military strategy and national security policy which posits that a full-scale use of nuclear weapons by an attacker on a nuclear-armed defender with second-strike capabilities would cause the complete annihilation of both the attacker and the defender.

Right to Health / Life - is the economic, social, and cultural right to a universal minimum standard of health to which all individuals are entitled

Al-Hol/ al-Hawl refugee camp - a refugee camp on the southern outskirts of the town of al-Hawl in northern Syria, close to the Syria-Iraq border, which holds individuals displaced from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

Honor Killings - the murder of a family member, most often a woman or girl, by another family members. The killers justify their actions by claiming that the victim has brought dishonor upon the family name or prestige.

Refugee - a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.

Arab Spring - was a series of anti-government protests, uprisings and armed rebellions that spread across much of the Arab world in the early 2010s. It began in Tunisia in response to corruption and economic stagnation

Key Issues

Humanitarian Issues

Food Shortages

Food storage has slowly become an enormous hurdle to overcome in Syria due to the ongoing war. An estimated 60% of Syrians, or 12.4 million people, are thought to not find secure or sustainable ways to get food. The World Food Program states that this is the "largest number ever recorded in the history of Syria" and represents a 57% increase since 2019.

Syrians can purchase fewer essentials every day due to their limited financial means. As the prices of necessities like water, food, fuel, and electricity rise and become unaffordable, their salaries and savings are losing value. Currently, households spend 50% more than they earn on average, sustained by their current savings that, for the average Syrian-born civilian, are not enough to last them much longer.

Fuel for running generators, powerhouses, vehicles, and water infrastructure is no longer affordable for families. Many Syrians only receive less than four hours of daily public electricity. Transport and everyday labor are more expensive due to rising gasoline prices. While it costs more to irrigate crops and deliver harvests to markets, farmers have less money to sow their fields.

Among the most significant grain exporters to the Middle East are Russia and Ukraine. The current, ongoing crisis in Ukraine may result in a regional shortfall of wheat supplies, according to the United Nations. They claim that Syria has already reacted by reducing its grain supplies, having an influence on the cost of staple items like bread and wheat.

Hunger is also being fueled by environmental shocks, including record-low rainfall. The anticipated harvest was severely hampered by Syria's worst drought in 70 years this year. A fourth of the pre-crisis norm and less than 1.045 million tonnes of wheat were projected to be produced in 2021, down from 2.8 million tonnes in 2020.

Children

For many children who were born in Syria, the only thing that they have seen is wartime. For a war that has been going on for over a decade, the war has been the only thing that these children see, becoming the only reality that they see. While impossible to quantify, there is physiological damage to these children, who constantly are in the fear of being attacked, stepping on a landmine, or becoming another casualty as a part of the war. These children will never live a peaceful life for the foreseeable future, with the issues of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and 'survivor's guilt' having graver impacts on children and on developing minds. In 2020 research by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) was conducted and the number of children who appeared to be psychologically damaged from the conflict due to a range of factors including the further restriction of external aid and resources due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Particularly worrying is the scenario in northern Syria. There are still millions of displaced children in the northwest, and many families have had to flee the conflict several times—some even up to seven times—to find safety. Living in tents, shelters, and damaged or incomplete buildings, they endured another long

winter while enduring extreme weather, including torrential rain and snow. The northwest was home to more than 75% of the serious offenses noted in 2020.

Before the civil war, Syria had a solid educational system in place, with almost all students attending primary school and 70% of children entering high school. Syria's literacy rate in 2004 was 79.6%, with 86% of men and 73.6% of women being literate. According to UNICEF, 700 000 Syrian refugee children and 2.1 million children in Syria lack access to education in 2016. Only a fraction of people are educated, leading to a large shortage of skilled labor amongst the next generation of Syrians and the associated pitfalls occurring concurrently.

According to UNICEF, around 7 million Syrian children are impoverished. Since the anti-regime protests began in March 2011, international trade restrictions have had a substantial negative influence on the civilian population's socioeconomic status. The sanctions have reduced the state's earnings, limiting the resources available to pay public sector salaries. As a result, numerous families' incomes have been significantly reduced. Furthermore, these restrictions are partly to blame for the rise in the price of basic commodities. This has significantly exacerbated the burden on families that spend the majority of their income on necessities.

The issue of food has been affecting many Syrians, especially the lower echelons of the income bracket who have no alternative means of receiving food. The issue of food has been an exponentially growing issue in Syria, considering the growing tariffs and sanctions from countries across the globe to stump Assad's regime has led to affecting the civilians of Syria directly. The shortages of food in Syria have led to acute malnutrition for many Children across Syria. According to UNICEF, "the price of the average food basket increased by over 230 percent in only the last year, more than half a million children under the age of five in Syria suffer from stunting as a result of chronic malnutrition and nearly 2.45 million children in Syria and an additional 750,000 Syrian children in neighboring countries are out of school; 40 percent of them are girls."

Before the war, child labor was a problem in Syria, but the humanitarian crisis that followed aggravated the situation. Families struggling to satisfy their necessities in Syria are sometimes forced to send their children to work, marry their girls too young, or allow their youngsters to be recruited by armed groups. Children work in agriculture, metalwork, construction, and restaurants, as well as selling products

on the street, washing cars, picking up trash, and even begging. Children (mostly boys) are forcibly recruited and employed as soldiers in Syria by all parties to the conflict, frequently without the approval of their parents, with half under the age of 15. These children are active participants in the conflict and can be utilized to kill, as they are occasionally assigned responsibilities that endanger their lives.

Sexual Violence

Between 2011 and 2015, the Syrian government (inclusive and generally referring to their armed forces deployed in combat) was allegedly responsible for 62% of rapes, while the Islamic State (ISIL / ISIS) "owns" hundreds of Yazidi women and gives Syrian girls as spouses to its warriors. The United Nations originally declared that rape was being used as a weapon of war in Syria in 2012, and has since condemned sexual violence on numerous occasions, accusing both the Syrian government and Islamic State soldiers. Though, the UN cannot intervene in the conflict on its own forces (using the United Nations Peacekeeping Forces (UNPKF)) and can merely condemn and provide humanitarian aid and assistance wherever possible. As a result, this leaves many of these individuals hopeless of a finite, concrete solution apart from the end of the war itself. Fear of rape is frequently stated by female refugees as a significant reason for fleeing Syria.

The Syrian government is a primary perpetrator of sexual violence against both men and women, accounting for 62 percent of rapes between 2011 and 2015, with pro-Baathist armed militias, or Bhabha, accounting for the remaining 23 percent.

Other women have reported being kidnapped, jailed, and raped in front of male relatives as a kind of blackmail. In 2015, 34% of reported rapes occurred while victims were detained, 23% occurred during home searches, and 15% occurred during abductions. According to reports, government soldiers have abducted women from checkpoints, raped them, then returned them to their families to identify them as rape victims and expose them to the social stigma associated with it. Concurrently, honor killings are becoming more common in Syria, and have even been reported in refugee groups.

The Islamic State (ISIS / ISIL) attracts fighters and rewards its militants through an organized system of sexual enslavement and forced marriage. Minority women

are purchased and sold in "slave bazaars" to combatants, and rape is so common that most are put on constant birth control regimens. Syrian girls are also given as brides to Islamic State members, and these marriages are frequently motivated by fear and accompanied by sexual, physical, and psychological abuse.

The Syrian government and non-state armed factions, particularly the extremist armed group Islamic State (ISIS / ISIL), have subjected men, boys, and transgender women to rape and other types of sexual abuse since the conflict began in March 2011. In Syria, heterosexual men and boys are subject to sexual violence, but gay and bisexual men and transgender people are especially vulnerable. While conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) affects mostly women and girls, males and boys are also affected. However, existing programs in gender-based violence (GBV) and child protection are almost entirely focused on meeting the needs of women and girls, with very little attention provided to males and boys.

Refugees

The continuing conflict, until even the status quo in nearly all areas of Syria has led to millions becoming displaced either out of choice to escape the war or out of force due to the destruction of their homes. Millions of Syrians have fled across borders, resulting in the world's worst refugee crisis in decades. Syria still has the world's largest refugee crisis after ten years. Since 2011, more than 6.8 million Syrians have been forced to evacuate their country, and another 6.9 million are internally displaced. The great majority of refugees - around 5.2 million - have sought asylum in neighboring countries, particularly Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. With almost 620,000 Syrian refugees, Germany is the largest non-neighboring host country.

More than 130 nations have accepted Syrian refugees, but the most majority live in neighboring countries within the area, including Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt. Turkey now has the highest number of registered Syrian refugees, at more than 3.6 million. Over 660,000 men, women, and children are today stuck in exile in Jordan. Around 80% of them reside outside of camps, while 128,000 have sought refuge in refugee camps such as Za'atari and Azraq. Iraq is also a major host country for Syrians, with over 244,000 registered refugees, while UNHCR offers safety and aid to over 130,000 in Egypt.

Many arrived with insufficient funds to meet even basic demands, and those who could initially depend on savings or support from host families are now more in need of assistance. Even before the pandemic, nearly four out of every five Syrian refugees in Jordan (approximately 80%) were living below the national poverty threshold, surviving on around US\$3 per day. Approximately 92% of refugees who have fled to neighboring countries live in rural and urban areas, with only about 5% residing in refugee camps. Living outside of refugee camps, on the other hand, does not guarantee prosperity or stability. More than 70% of Syrian refugees are impoverished, with little access to basic amenities, education, or employment possibilities, and little prospects of returning home. The great majority of Syrian refugees in neighboring countries reside in cities, with only one in every twenty being housed in a refugee camp. For almost a million Syrian refugees with little or no financial resources, life is a daily struggle in all neighboring countries. Many people have lost their jobs after the COVID-19 outbreak began. In Lebanon, nine out of 10 refugees are now impoverished. As a result of the lack of organized refugee camps, Syrians are dispersed throughout urban and rural areas and locales, frequently sharing modest basic dwellings with other refugee families in crowded conditions.

Though one must understand that the issue remains in a state of constant discourse due to countries not being capable of housing the entirety of the Syrian population, and hence the entirety of Syria cannot be removed from the country and displaced in other regions. Countries, through legal statutes and via moral ethics, have an obligation to cater to their current populations rather than inviting refugees and migrants, especially when most of the western world has a massive housing crisis and is still facing the consequences and damages of the COVID-19 pandemic. The overall understanding is that, in the status quo, it is an enormous cost for most nations to admit refugees into their country. As a result, the issue of refugees must be tackled with care else the issue can spiral into a global conflict, which would yet again bring conflict back to Syria and the Middle East as a whole.

Proxy war

Israel vs. Iran

In 2018, Israel caught an Iranian drone that had flown into Israeli airspace from neighboring Syria via Jordan. For some time now, Iran has openly supported Syrian President Bashar Assad's administration (mostly through its proxy Hezbollah), while Israel has tried to stay out of the Syrian quagmire, at least publicly. However, with Iran breaching Israeli airspace, Israel was forced to retaliate, unleashing an airstrike on Syrian and Iranian military sites. Syria shot down an Israeli jet, while Israel continued to attack various military installations.

Turkey v.s. Kurds

In the summer of 2015, Turkey became the first country to act in Syria. It was apparently in reaction to an ISIS suicide assault in Suruç, a border town. The fact that Kurdish forces within Syria were making significant progress against both Assad and ISIS weighed heavily on Ankara; indeed, some say that Kurdish advances were the primary impetus for Turkey's participation in the war.

More than 40,000 people have been killed in Turkish-Kurdish violence throughout the years. The triumph of Kurds in Syria emboldens the Kurdish separatist movement within Turkey's borders, according to the Turkish authorities. That is why Turkey has targeted Syrian Kurdish groups.

Turkey vs. the United States

There are now roughly 2,000 American troops in Syria as part of an anti-ISIS coalition, but the United States' primary contribution to the conflict in Syria has been its 11,000+ airstrikes against ISIS strongholds, as well as its training and equipping of anti-ISIS forces, including Syria's Kurdish militias.

Washington's support for Kurdish militia troops has long irritated Ankara, but things reached a head last month when the US declared it would assist in the establishment of a 30,000-strong border force in northeastern Syria, with Kurdish fighters serving as the backbone. This was inexcusable to Turkey, which mounted a massive military operation codenamed "Operation Olive Branch".

Russia vs. the United States

Russia entered the war to support Assad, a long-time ally of Moscow. Syria is strategically significant for Russia since it is home to Moscow's sole naval base with direct access to the Mediterranean. Russia, together with Iran, has been essential in cementing Assad's grip on the country, enhancing Russia's standing as

a serious actor in the Middle East. In just a month, Russia will hold presidential elections. Much of Putin's popularity is based on his ability to reestablish Russia's place in the world order following the demise of the Soviet Union.

Islamists (Turkey/Iran/Qatar) vs. Secularists (Russia/US/UAE)

Aside from the proxy wars, Syria is a microcosm of the basic war currently raging in the Middle East: secularism vs. Islamism.

On one side, some advocate for a more secular Syria, including Russia, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates. On the other hand, Turkey, Iran, and Qatar are pushing for an Islamist Syria. (While one demands a Sunni demography and the other a Shia demographic)

While each of these actors has separate political interests and forces in Syria that they support, they collectively offer two radically divergent visions of Syria's future. Whichever constellation of people emerges successfully will have a significant impact on Syria's future tilt towards one of two extremes.

Authoritarian Regimes and Aggressive Parties Present

Bashar al-Assad

When anti-government protests occurred in the southern Syrian city of Deraa in mid-March 2011, he argued that calls for change and economic complaints had been overwhelmed by saboteurs working for an outside plot to destroy Syria's stability and unity. The following month, Assad repealed the despised Emergency Law, which had been in effect since 1963. However, the assault on protestors increased, with soldiers and tanks being sent into troubled villages and cities to battle "armed criminal gangs." Despite President Assad's efforts and reform vows, the revolt continued unabated in practically every corner of the country. Opposition sympathizers began to arm themselves, first to defend themselves, then to drive loyalist soldiers out of their districts.

However, in January 2012, Assad reversed his position and vowed to smash "terrorist" with a "iron hand." By the end of the year, seeing the death count had

surpassed 60,000, Assad had ruled out any dialogue with the rebels, whom he had labeled "enemies of God and puppets of the West."

In early 2013, pro-government troops, along with Hezbollah, launched offensives to retake territory in southern and western Syria, and began sending members of its military arm to battle the rebels. He initiated a barrage of regular chemical weapon usage that has lasted till the status quo and has become a big component of their defense strategies in combat, employing chemical weaponry whenever needed and freely to protect favorable areas. "

Following a string of defeats in the first half of 2015, Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the launch of a major air campaign in support of Assad that September, and now outright stated that Assad's dictatorial regime has now become endorsed by one of the largest manpowers in the military, industrial, and armament fields. The Russian military claimed that its strikes would only target "terrorists," but activists claimed that they regularly attacked mainstream rebel organisations and civilian areas, tilting the balance of power considerably in Assad's favour. UN human rights investigators charged the government and Russian forces with war crimes during the offensives, which claimed to have killed hundreds of civilians and caused tens of thousands to flee.

After retaking Eastern Ghouta, pro-government forces turned their attention to the last three resistance strongholds. They retook an area north of Homs in May 2018, and two months later, they regained full control of Daraa province. Assad was unafraid, but the onslaught was halted in September by an accord involving Russia and Turkey, that called for a "demilitarised buffer zone" across the front line and the withdrawal of the Islamist rebels who dominate Idlib. However, the agreement was never completely followed, and fighting on the ground as well as air strikes continued.

Syrian Government

Tens of thousands of people, including journalists, human rights advocates, attorneys, and political activists, were subjected to enforced disappearances, many for up to ten years. Between January and April, the government arbitrarily imprisoned 400 people for their online criticism of the government's handling of the economic crisis, including judges, attorneys, journalists, and public sector

personnel. The government released them on May 11, two weeks before the presidential election, in an unusual move. Between mid-2017 and April 2021, government forces subjected refugees, including children, who returned to Syria to arbitrary imprisonment, torture, and other ill-treatment, including rape and other sexual abuse, and enforced disappearance - and interrogated them in connection with their purported resistance to the government.

[Syrian National Army\(SNA\)](#)

The SNA (2022 coalition), a pro-Turkey coalition of armed organizations, continued to commit a variety of violations against civilians in Afrin and Ras al-Ayn, primarily Syrian Kurds. Arbitrary detention, abduction, torture, and other ill-treatment were among the violations. The SNA abused captives during questioning, according to the UN Commission of Inquiry, to elicit "confessions." While confined in informal detention centers, detainees were also refused legal representation and communication with their families (illegal under the Geneva Conventions).

[Autonomous Administration led by PYD](#)

The Autonomous Administration continues to keep tens of thousands of people suspected of belonging to the Islamic State armed group, including children, in unsanitary conditions and without recourse to due process in the al-Hol camp. Women and children were denied freedom of movement in the annex of the al-Hol camp, where third-country people were kept. Due to several checkpoints and security inspections by the Asayish, the Autonomous Administration's police force, this hampered their access to healthcare in the camp.

Without any evidence of crime, the Asayish arbitrarily held boys as young as 12 in the annex, removing them from their mothers and caregivers. The Asayish moved the boys to "rehabilitation centers" outside of the al-Hol camp, where they lacked proper access to food, water, and healthcare and where diseases like tuberculosis and lice were common.

Major Parties Involved in the Conflict

[United States \(Obama Administration\)](#)

The first watershed moment in Obama's Syria policy occurred in 2011. Following the Assad regime's violent response to peaceful protests, and after much consideration, President Obama took a significant step forward in US policy toward Syria, declaring that "for the sake of the Syrian people, the time has come for President Assad to move aside." In other words, "the Obama administration also urged the UN to denounce Syria's regime."

The US then closed its embassy in Damascus and began to participate in Syrian opposition activities such as the Friends of Syria forum, which gathered in Tunisia and Istanbul. The second watershed moment in Obama's Syria policy occurred in 2012. In an August 2012 statement, President Obama stated that if the Assad regime uses or seeks to use chemical weapons, US policy toward Syria would change.

The third phase of Obama's Syria strategy occurred in 2013 when Obama restated the red line in Syria in his 2013 speech following the Ghouta chemical incident. Then, in response to the regime's chemical-weapons strikes, Obama canceled military retaliation. With the involvement of regional and local actors in the war after 2013, the Syrian issue got increasingly complicated. Russia initiated a military involvement in Syria in 2015 to assist the Assad administration. Similarly, Iran, specifically Hezbollah, is engaging in the Syrian civil war to help the Assad regime.

[United States \(Trump Administration\)](#)

The Trump administration has a few distinct goals and has used a variety of means to achieve them; nevertheless, it is unclear how those goals and tools will address the issues they are intended to tackle. The Trump administration's ambitions are more limited than repairing Syria.

Trump has stated unequivocally that he will work to destroy ISIS right from his 2016 election campaign. It is also reasonable to conclude that the Trump administration wishes to discourage the Syrian regime from using chemical weapons again within Syria, and finally. While President Trump never has outright addressed it, influential Defense Secretary James Mattis has stated that US forces in Syria would not just battle ISIS but would also aid in the achievement of a political settlement to the Syrian civil war. Fighting ISIS, discouraging the use of

chemical weapons, and hoping for a political settlement are all strategies that do not add up to a coherent plan for resolving the Syrian conflict or even containing extremists indefinitely. Trump and his military and diplomatic teams have continued to offer only short-term, tactical responses, with no indication of what the Americans want long-term in Syria or how they intend to achieve it.

Prior to leaving office, he stated that establishing the Democratic Federation necessitates a longer and larger American commitment than Trump is willing to endure. Trump stated that he and Macron "do not want to give Iran an open season on the Mediterranean." Along with the French, Israel and Saudi Arabia have lobbied Trump to keep troops in eastern Syria to limit Iranian influence in Syria, and Trump vowed on April 25 that the US will deny any Iranian land access to the Mediterranean.

President Trump may well claim that he is defining American interests in Syria more narrowly. Trump wants to avoid getting involved in Syria and instead delegate responsibility to regional states and Russia. Some officials believe that continued Syrian Kurdish control of eastern Syria will force the Assad government to negotiate and reach a serious agreement.

Russia

The West frequently misunderstands Russia's strategic culture, focusing not just on Western Europe and the United States, but also on Central Asia and the Middle East.

Unlike Britain's and France's empires, which were literally and metaphorically separated, Russia's imperial expansion was primarily at the expense of her neighbors' independence; hence, the empire was Russia and Russia could not exist without it. This distinguishing feature has resulted in the formation of a strategic culture in which the border between offensive and defensive warfare is, at best, blurred, which must be noted when considering the Syrian war.

A primary reason for Russian President Vladimir Putin is to capitalize on the United States' failure to intervene against Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, and

to achieve great power status in the eyes of Washington in the process. However, Moscow has been careful not to make the same mistakes it made in Afghanistan in the 1980s. The purpose in Syria was to save the Assad regime at any cost. Moscow chose to rely on air and naval power while leaving ground operations to Iran and its militia proxies. This strategy allowed Moscow to continue its war in Syria while avoiding a replay of Afghanistan.

Russia's "spheres of influence" concept in Syria refers to 19th and 20th century geopolitics. Bound by Syria's complex conflict dynamics, Moscow's strategy accepts Syria's de facto zones of control, which essentially translate into three major spheres of influence: Russia in the west, particularly along Syria's strategic spine; Turkey in the north; and, to Moscow's chagrin, the United States in the east. Several nuances exist within this rudimentary paradigm.

Moscow's "spheres of influence" concept adheres to the numerous limits Russia faces, both in Syria and at home, limiting its capacity to project maximal strength. While Moscow emphasizes the significance of restoring Syria's full territorial integrity (and the Assad government insists on it), the Russian endgame recognises that powerful external parties will continue to hold authority over significant swathes of Syria. Rather than taking the risks and making the massive investments required to drive these foreign powers out of Syria, Russia has formed a synergistic cooperation with one, Turkey, while restricting its opposition to provocative probing of the other, the US.

[Iran \(Mohammad-Ali Foroughi as Prime Minister\)](#)

The Islamic Republic of Iran has waged a massive, costly, and integrated campaign to keep President Bashar al-Assad in office for as long as possible, while also establishing conditions to maintain its capacity to use Syrian land and assets to pursue regional objectives if Assad falls.

Iranian intelligence and security services are advising and aiding the Syrian military in order to keep Bashar al-Assad in power. These operations have expanded into an expeditionary training mission including the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Forces, the Quds Force, intelligence services, and law enforcement forces. The deployment of IRGC Ground Forces to

foreign conflicts demonstrates Iran's determination and ability to project military force beyond its boundaries.

Iran has been supplying Assad with vital military supplies, largely via air. Many ground resupply lines between Baghdad and Damascus have been cut off by opposition successes in Syria, and the relative scarcity of Iranian port visits in Syria shows that Iran's sea-lanes to Syria are more symbolic than practical. The air link between Iran and Syria is thus a critical vulnerability for Iranian policy in Syria. If this aviation route were closed due to a no-fly zone or opposition seizure of Syrian airfields, Iran would be unable to maintain its current level of support for Assad.

As Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah admitted on April 30 in Tehran, Hezbollah has assisted Assad with a strong, well-trained force whose participation in the conflict accords with Iranian strategic goals. However, Hezbollah's devotion is not without constraints, as Nasrallah must carefully balance his support for Assad with his domestic responsibilities to avoid alienating his main audience in Lebanon.

Iran's influence in the Levant has already been limited by the Syrian conflict, and the fall of the Assad administration would further limit Tehran's capacity to project authority. Iran's hedging strategy, on the other hand, attempts to ensure that it can continue to pursue its critical interests if and when the regime collapses, utilizing parts of Syria as a base until the point where the Syrian opposition fails to gain complete control of all of Syria's territory.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is a long standing, and one and often only ally that the United States remains to have in the Middle East, continuing the economic trade practice in exchange for political backing that has been going on for years. Saudi Arabia, oftentimes, functions as an extension of the United States policy, in other words Saudi Arabia will work against any actor that the United States opposes and vice-versa.

Their main involvement, over the course of the war, has been funding groups that, in one form or the other, oppose Assad or his administration as well as remain in

the lines of being a peaceful actor, not supporting non-state actors or extremist groups such as ISIS / ISIL and al-Qaeda. While their on-ground support is limited and cannot be accurately measured due to the recent shift in regimes being significantly more discrete in their military policies, they constantly provide funding towards groups such as the Kurds and the Syrian Rebel groups (such as the current coalition of the Syrian National Army). Though in recent years their policies are slowly starting to work towards compromise and peaceful negotiation rather than continuing the war.

According to sources with direct knowledge of the conversations, Saudi Arabia is close to achieving an accord on diplomatic normalization with President Bashar al-regime, Assad's as Riyadh (Saudi Arabia's capital) jockeys to take the lead in removing the Iranian presence from Syria.

Saudi Arabia has played a prominent role in the proxy battle to depose al-Assad since the beginning of the Syrian crisis. As part of the attempt, Riyadh provided funds and weapons to a variety of local rebel organizations, including US-made anti-tank missiles. The effort stalled after bigger counter-interventions by al-main Assad's foreign backers, Russia and Iran.

Iraqi President Barham Salih announced in May that Saudi Arabia and Iran held bilateral discussions in Baghdad (Iraq's capital) to defuse simmering tensions. However, while attempting to defuse tensions with Iran in order to prevent armed conflict, Saudi Arabia's efforts are also a resurrection of Sunni Gulf monarchies' decades-long campaign to pull Syria out of Tehran's geopolitical circle.

Timeline

1946	Syria concludes a treaty with France ending French rule in Syria. French troops are withdrawn.
1947	The Ba 'th party, an Arab nationalist party formed by Ṣalah al-Dīn al-Bīṭār and Michel ' Aflaq in the early 1940s, holds its first congress in Damascus.
2000	Ḥafiz al-Assad dies in June. The following day, the People's

	<p>Assembly amends the constitution to lower the minimum age of the president to 34, allowing Bashar al-Assad, then 34 years old, to succeed his father in office. He was elected president in a referendum in July. In November, Assad released 600 political prisoners, a move that is seen by many as a sign of his intention to advance democratic reforms.</p>
<p>April 16-19, 2011</p>	<p>Assad gives his second speech since the protests began. He offers some concessions, vowing to lift Syria's long-standing emergency law, which grants security forces broad authority to investigate and arrest Syrians when national security is deemed to be at risk.</p> <p>Syria's emergency law is lifted, although the Syrian opposition dismisses the concession as merely cosmetic. The security forces continue to shoot and detain protesters.</p>
<p>July 18, 2012</p>	<p>An explosion at the National Security Building in Damascus kills or injures a number of senior Syrian military and security officials responsible for the crackdown against the opposition. Those killed in the blast include Assef Shawkat, Bashar al-Assad's brother-in-law and one of his closest advisers, and Daoud Rajiha, the minister of defense. Syrian state media claim that the attack was conducted by a suicide bomber. Senior members of the Free Syrian Army claim that the explosives were placed by a double agent within the Syrian security services and detonated remotely.</p>
<p>July 25, 2013</p>	<p>UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announces that the UN estimates that more than 100,000 people have been killed since the start of the conflict.</p>
<p>June 30, 2014</p>	<p>After making significant territorial gains in Iraq in addition to its territory in Syria, the extremist militant group Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) declares itself a caliphate, with Abu</p>

	Bakr al-Baghdadi as its leader.
September 30, 2015	Russia carries out its first airstrikes in Syria
March 2016	Syrian troops, bolstered by Hezbollah fighters and Russian air support, retake Palmyra from ISIL.
December 22, 2016	The Syrian government declares victory in Aleppo after the last rebel fighters are evacuated from the city.
April 14, 2018	U.S., U.K., and French forces launch air strikes targeting chemical weapons facilities near Damascus and Homs in response to a chemical weapons attack in Douma a week prior.
April–June 2019	Idlib comes under assault from Syrian government forces backed by Russian air strikes, but rebel forces are able to push the fighting back into the neighboring province of Hama.

[Timeline sourced from Britannica.com](#)

Previously Attempted Solutions

In 2012, the United Nations convened the first ever peace talks in Geneva, Switzerland. The United States, Turkey, and Gulf countries all back the various parties. Iran, Assad's ally, was not invited to the negotiations. The first Geneva negotiations' final accord authorised the participants to debate Assad's removal during a transition period. This was the first of many failures. With Russian and Iranian support, Assad began to consolidate his position by 2015. In 2017, UN-mediated negotiations were again called off as the Syrian regime team refused to discuss the constitutional process nor presidential elections.

With the Geneva negotiations faltering, Iran barred, and Turkey at odds with the US over its support for the YPG, a new route of communication opened up. In 2016, Russia, Turkey, and Iran held talks in the Kazakh city of Astana with the

leadership of Russia, Iran, and Turkey. The Astana meeting gathered together the most powerful fighting opposition organizations on the ground, forcing them to sit down with the government for the first time since the war began. The Astana talks produced greater outcomes than the Geneva talks because the three guarantor countries, Iran, Russia, and Turkey, agreed on "de-escalation zones" to reduce bloodshed in predominantly opposition-held areas. Even while the deal momentarily reduced violence, it was not fully implemented as the Syrian regime continued its air strikes on so-called de-escalation areas.

With ISIL in retreat, Russia opened a new round of Syria talks in Sochi, reaffirming its role as a dominating participant. The Astana trio, Turkey as the opposition's guarantor and Syrian regime backer Iran, and Russia, arranged the negotiations once more. As a result, the Syrian opposition refused to attend the meeting. The Sochi negotiations centered on Syria's future, a proposed constitution, and a path for establishing a demilitarized zone. The agreement has not been fully implemented because Syrian regime forces have broken it in various regions within the designated buffer zone, and no significant progress has been made on drafting a new constitution following a resolution to form a constitutional committee made up of 150 candidates.

Leaders from Russia, France, and Germany will meet in Istanbul as part of a new effort to find a political settlement in war-torn Syria. With the participation of European countries that have suffered a significant refugee surge, the summit's focus is expected to be on refugees. According to Turkey's presidential advisor Ibrahim Kalin, the meeting's focus would be on sustaining last month's deal on Idlib, the last major opposition-held stronghold, and preventing violations by the Assad government in the province. Concerns have been expressed by UN agencies and international non-governmental organizations that a regime onslaught on Idlib could result in an additional refugee exodus. Russia and Turkey agreed in September to establish a demilitarized zone in the area and conduct coordinated patrols to avert additional fighting. Following the agreement, the Turkish Defense Ministry declared that heavy weaponry will be removed from the area. Syrian rebels exchanged fire with government forces in northern Syria overnight, the "fiercest" exchanges since a demilitarized zone agreement was declared for the area last month, according to the war monitor Syrian Observatory for Human Rights on Thursday.

Since 2013, the United Nations Security Council has enacted 27 resolutions addressing humanitarian access, peace talks, and chemical weapons in Syria. Notwithstanding this, Russia and China have vetoed eleven draft resolutions on Syria jointly, and Russia has vetoed an additional seven unilaterally.

The United Nations General Assembly decided on December 21, 2016, to establish an International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism to aid in the investigation and prosecution of culprits of atrocities in Syria. Two members of Syria's intelligence services, Eyad A. and Anwar R., have been convicted in Germany for complicity in and perpetration of crimes against humanity, correspondingly, and a third prosecution involving charges of torture and murder by a Syrian state agent is presently continuing. On September 18, 2020, the Dutch government formally requested discussions with the Syrian government as a first step in holding Syria responsible for violations of the United Nations Convention Against Torture. On April 21, 2021, a majority of Chemical Weapons Convention States Parties voted to terminate Syria's rights and privileges under the treaty.

The UN Secretary-general's report, released in August 2022, proposed that the UNGA establish an impartial international organization dedicated to determining the fate and whereabouts of missing persons in Syria, as well as aiding victims, survivors, and their relatives.

The EU will remain in diplomatic relations with all parties involved in the Syria conflict - the UN, the US, Russia, Turkey, Iran, Arab nations, and others - in order to reach an agreement that will bring the war to an end. Simultaneously, and equally crucial, we will continue to interact with civil society. Their voices are critical, as I discovered when meeting with them this week, in properly comprehending what is happening, what is required, and how Syria of the future might be shaped.

Possible Solutions

[Turkish-Kurdish Arrangement](#)

The first step in this process will be for the US to reach an agreement with its Turkish and Kurdish partners. Turkey is fighting the PKK in Kurdish territories in Syria and Iraq, and it is concerned that the US is facilitating the formation of an independent Kurdish state. The Turkish military's attacks on YPG strongholds in northern Syria and northwestern Iraq on April 25th have complicated the situation and may foreshadow an escalation. To dissuade more Turkish strikes, the US replied with military patrols along the Syria-Turkey border and a robust show of support for local Syrian-Kurdish partners.

To convince Turkey, the US will need to demonstrate to Ankara that it would define and enforce clear and credible limits on the Kurds' geographical control and influence in Syria. In practice, this means that the US must be prepared to deliver a total SDF withdrawal to the east bank of the Euphrates while also pushing for the inclusion of political organizations so that Turkey can live within the unofficial autonomous administration of SDF-controlled areas of northern and eastern Syria.

The Trump administration should also make it clear that American help will be withdrawn if Kurdish political parties in SDF-controlled regions do not take credible steps to disassociate themselves from the PKK. The decision to allow the US military to supply guns, ammo, and vehicles directly to the Kurdish-majority YPG in support of the Raqqa campaign may give the US more control over the Kurds. However, the decision raises severe concerns with Turkey as the alliance prepares to assist the SDF in capturing Raqqa from ISIS and then holding and administering the city.

Even as it addresses valid Turkish concerns, the US must require that Turkey take several steps that are crucial to Syrian Kurds and their SDF friends in return. In exchange for the SDF's departure east of the Euphrates, Turkey should enable the establishment of a secure transportation route through its buffer zone to allow Kurdish residents to transit between fragmented Kurdish cantons. In exchange for increased participation of openly pro-Turkish political parties in SDF-controlled areas, Turkey could promise to support a decentralized future Syrian government that would grant SDF-controlled areas in northern and eastern Syria significant local autonomy. The Trump administration could grant the SDF continuing U.S. assistance in exchange for the YPG's denial of the PKK.

[Bargaining with Russia and Iran](#)

The US will also need to reach an agreement with Russia and Iran to eradicate any surviving ISIS and al Qaeda safe-havens. The issue here will be reaching an agreement with Russia, whose air support is crucial to Assad's capacity to regain territory. However, given Moscow's heinous behavior since its intervention in September 2015, any such agreement must come with significant caveats. Indeed, in the aftermath of the chemical weapons strikes in Idlib, US-Russian cooperation should be regarded as a nonstarter unless Assad is subjected to serious limitations.

One goal should be to codify the currently de facto military deconfliction arrangements between Russia and Assad on the one hand, and the US and Turkey on the other, to manage hostilities in core ISIS regions that remain unconquered. Future flashpoints that could spark conflict between Russia, Assad, and the US are in and around Raqqa, as well as further east in the lower Euphrates River valley, and around Deir al-Zour. Military realities will most likely define who takes and holds this land. The governance of both core areas of eastern Syria should be decided in collaboration with Russia.

The Russian accord will also be critical in eliminating al Qaeda-held territory in Idlib; but, the Trump administration should only work with Moscow under severe terms. The goal is to distinguish between moderate and extreme members of the opposition and to use selective force only against the latter. The Astana "de-escalation zones" agreement mandates Assad's forces to refrain from flying over the specified areas, but it still allows for ongoing operations against "terrorists". If Assad's air force continues to operate under the current agreement, Washington must demand that all of them be grounded before collaborating with Moscow.

As a result, in addition to preserving its pledge to strike Assad if the regime employs chemical weapons again, the Trump administration should seek a Russian-American deal to halt Assad's indiscriminate air strikes on opposition-held regions in northwest Syria (as well as in southwestern Syria and around Damascus). The government should also press Russia to halt any ground offensives launched by Iran in these areas.

In exchange, the Trump administration could commit to leading and cooperating with Turkey, Jordan, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia to put pressure on the armed opposition in these areas to disassociate themselves from and challenge extremist

groups, especially the al Qaeda front Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. The Trump administration also could agree to share tactical information with Russia against extremist groups, but only if Moscow offers credible commitments to align air operations with international law and to give Washington veto power over targets; and US support should be withdrawn immediately if Russia continues to bomb civilians.

When the Obama administration attempted to negotiate similar terms last November, Russia demonstrated an unwillingness or inability to meet them. The same might be said today. However, given Russia's desire for deeper cooperation with the Trump administration, as well as the incremental leverage generated by the April 6th cruise missile assault and public outrage over Assad's behavior, the Trump administration should retest the concept. Furthermore, while the Obama administration's attempt to broker an exact mechanism with Russia proved unsustainable in the context of the battle for the vital strategic city of Aleppo, Moscow places far less importance on Idlib and might now be more inclined to accept operational constraints in exchange for combating terrorism cooperation with Washington.

Getting Russia to accept these operational limits and convince Assad to agree to a decentralized political system would necessitate aggressive negotiating and a disciplined insistence on tight conditions for any US involvement. The endeavor may fail, but anything fewer risks American cooperation in the Assad regime's and its supporters' continued atrocities, exacerbating Syria's humanitarian situation and pushing more resistance into the hands of al Qaeda.

The Trump administration will need to engage in rigorous negotiating and disciplined insistence on severe conditions for any U.S. collaboration to persuade Russia to accept these operational limits and to put pressure on Assad to accept a decentralized political structure. Even if the endeavor fails, doing anything less might result in American complicity in ongoing crimes carried out by the Assad regime and those who support it, a worsening of the humanitarian crisis in Syria, and a greater number of the resistance falling into the clutches of al Qaeda.

The Trump administration also possesses significant financial clout, but to use it, the president will need to abandon his anti-nation-building rhetoric. Rough calculations indicate that Syria's reconstruction will cost hundreds of billions of

dollars. The regime and its supporters will be left holding the bag in the absence of concerted measures by the United States, working with the United Nations, the European Union, and wealthy Gulf states. If they choose to use it, this provides the Trump administration and its supporters enormous potential to influence how the Syrian conflict plays out.

Trump appears to place little value on international aid and humanitarian assistance based on the significant budget cutbacks he has suggested for the U.S. Agency for International Development and the State Department. However, the offer to collaborate with the world community to collect money for Syria's reconstruction should not be seen as a charitable gesture; rather, it should be seen as a strategic necessity. The only way to stop extremists from reemerging from the ruins of liberated territories is to implement this measure. Additionally, it should appeal to Trump's dealmaker side because it gives the government a significant negotiating chip.

Iran

President Trump will need to step outside of his comfort zone in order to end the Syrian war because the Trump administration will need to communicate with Iran. Trump has criticized the Iran nuclear agreement and warned Iran about its ballistic missile launches and other unsettling actions. Furthermore, Iran's regional instability has been a point of contention for both Secretary of State Tillerson and Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, who have both publicly stated their intention to take a tough stance on the issue. The president has demonstrated no desire to talk to Tehran about easing tensions, but given the situation in Syria, he is left with few options.

Israel and Gulf Partners

Reaching out to Iran will cause some of America's regional allies to become uneasy, especially Israel, which is concerned about the IRGC's expanding influence near its border, as well as Saudi Arabia and other Gulf nations, which have largely supported the Syrian opposition in order to bleed Iran dry. However, there are approaches that might potentially win over Israeli and Gulf state worries about Iran and win their support for the de-escalation and decentralization framework put forth here.

While it is impractical to completely expel Iran from Syria, there are some places where the United States and its allies may cooperate to lessen Iran's influence in the Levant and the Arabian Peninsula in order to reassure Israel and the Gulf states. The United States might take a number of actions to thwart Tehran's attempts to threaten Israel and build a land bridge from Iran to Lebanon via Iraq and Syria. By establishing the buffer state in southern Syria, it may be possible to keep the IRGC away from Israel's border while enabling the region's moderate opposition groups to take on Sunni extremists who may otherwise pose a threat to Jordanian security or Israel.

In order to balance an Iranian attempt to dominate the region, the United States should simultaneously urge and allow anti-ISIS troops in Syria to shift their focus toward Deir al-Zour and the lower Euphrates River valley when Raqqa is liberated. The Trump administration must pledge to continue assisting the Iraqi government on the Iraqi side of the border after ISIS is defeated in Mosul. By maintaining American influence in Iraq, Washington may be able to exert pressure on Baghdad to reduce the flow of Iranian weapons into Syria while partially offsetting Iranian influence. While none of these measures is perfect or total, they might greatly reduce Iran's capacity to project strength into the Levant, reducing concerns in Israel and the Gulf.

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