

# OSJMMUN

## Political Committee



Issue :  
Syrian Civil War

**Forum: Political Committee**

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**Introduction:**

The Syrian Civil War has constantly been at the forefront of international concern and policy ever since its beginnings in 2011. This issue, though beginning in Syria, has spread to have a truly global impact, leaving no member state unaffected. The United Nations has implemented countless resolutions to address this issue, however, none has been fully effective, causing violence and bloodshed to persist, and even progress. It has been estimated that 475,000 have been killed within Syria as a result of this conflict, with as many as 1200 being killed outside of Syria in attacks directly linked to the region.

**KeyWords:**

**Ethnic:** Relating to a particular race of people

**Cult:** A religious group, often living together, whose beliefs are considered extreme or strange by many people

**Middle East:** The area from the eastern Mediterranean to Iran including Syria, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq, and sometimes also Egypt.

**Sarin:** A poisonous gas that attacks the nervous system and can kill, sometimes used as a chemical weapon.

**Civil War:** A war fought by different groups of people living in the same country.

**Rebel:** A person who is opposed to the political system in their country and tries to change it using force.

**Revolution:** A change in the way a country is governed, usually to a different political system and often using violence or war.

**Ethnic Minority:** A group of people of a particular race or nationality living in a country or area where most people are from a different race or nationality.

**Arab Spring:** The Arab Spring was a series of pro-democracy uprisings that enveloped several largely Muslim countries, including Tunisia, Morocco, Syria, Libya, Egypt and Bahrain. The events in these nations generally began in the spring of 2011, which led to the name.

## **History**

### *Peaceful Protest to Bloodbath*

In March of 2011, a group of teenage Syrian Protestors in Deraa, a city in the southern part of the country, were tortured for writing revolutionary slogans on a public school wall. In response, protestors calling for greater democratization gathered outside the building of the Ba'ath party. Syrian armed forces attacked with arms, killing an estimated 220 protestors and leading to incarceration of over a thousand of innocent citizens. This siege only encouraged more protests and opposition from the people, calling out against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad for allowing this tragedy to occur. That summer, just a few months after the incident in Deraa, hundreds of thousands of Syrians joined the fight, calling for President Assad to step down. When security forces continued to use violence against these protestors, the opposition armed themselves, which led to the beginning of a full on civil war.



Protestors in Deraa.

### *Civil War Arises*

As the fight between the rebels and security forces grew and continued, the conflict became territorial. By 2012, the conflict had spread to Syria's two largest eastern cities, Damascus and Aleppo, catching the attention of the International press. United Nations statistics state that 90,000 Syrians had been killed in the war by June 2013, less than a year from the start. By August 2015, that number nearly tripled, reaching 250,000.

### **Ethnic Groups**

**Armenians:** They first came to northern Syria in small numbers under the Armenian Empire. In the first half of the 7th century, Armenia was conquered by the Rashidun Caliphate (632-661) and Armenians were taken into slavery. Armenia was captured by the Seljuk Empire (1037-1194) and many Armenians fled the country to settle in the region of northern Syria. The Ottoman Empire took control of Armenian people after they conquered Syria in 1516. Prior to the ongoing Syrian Civil War, it was estimated that anywhere from 70,000 to 100,000 Armenians lived in Syria.

**Circassians:** Circassians first came to Syria following a forced migration from their original homeland in the Caucasus Mountains to

Balkan and Anatolia regions of the Ottoman Empire after Russia defeated them in the Caucasian War (1817-64). They are in Syrian Civil War now.

**Syrian Kurds/Kurdish People:** Syrian Kurds were referred to as the ‘forgotten Kurds’ since they attracted very little attention from researchers and public media. The Syrian Civil War placed the Syrian Kurds on the regional map as they managed to occupy and control some of the northern parts of the country. They even sparked global interest when they proved to be the most effective and loyal Middle Eastern allies to the American-led coalition against the Islamic State on the Syrian front of the battle (IISS 2016, 310).

**Turkmens of Syria:** Syrian Turkmens first migrated to Syria in the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century when the area was ruled by the Seljuk Empire, but most came to Syria after the Ottoman Empire conquered it in 1516. Since the Syrian Civil War broke out, Syrian Turkmen fought against the government and asked Turkey for support since Syrian Turkmen had close ties with the country. In December 2012, the Syrian Turkmen Assembly and its military wing of the Syrian Turkmen Brigades formed to protect Turkmen settlements and represent them at peace talks.

**Arabs:** The majority of the Syrian people is Arabs. They came to Syria with the conquest of this region from the Arabian Peninsula. Their religion is Islam as well.

## Timeline

### *Date Event*

January 2011	Uprising begins as part of the Arab Spring
March 2011	Protest actions spread throughout Syria; Syrian security forces respond with violence
July 2012	Start of the armed conflict that spreads into Aleppo, Syria's largest city and commercial capital
November 2012	The Syrian National Coalition (SNC) is formed, bringing majority of the opposition forces together
August 21, 2013	The regime drops chemical weapons in two rebel-held zones near Damascus, killing approximately 1,400 people
June 3, 2014	Bashar al-Assad is reelected as President
June 2014	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria militants declare "caliphate" in territory from Aleppo to eastern Iraqi province of Diyala
September 2015	Russia carries out its first air strikes in Syria, claiming that it aimed to eradicate ISIS; however, western powers and the rebel forces state that it overwhelmingly targeted the rebels
December 2016	Assad's troops take back Aleppo
April 2017	Trump orders airstrikes against Syrian airbase

## **Events:**

**2011:** Movements broke out after security forces arrested a group of boys for spray-painting anti-government graffiti on their school walls. Security forces opened fire on the unarmed protesters, killing four people. In response to civilian deaths across Syria, then US President Barack Obama called on the President of Syria, Assad, to resign.

**2012:** The fighting spread to Aleppo, the second-largest city in Syria. Obama warned that if Syria used chemical weapons, it would have "enormous consequences" that would change his idea about involving in the country's civil war. He infamously called it a "red line."

**2013:** A gas attack in Aleppo killed 26 people, at least half of whom were government soldiers. After an investigation, UN concluded that sarin gas was used, but they couldn't determine who used it. Both the government and the rebel forces accused each other of using the prohibited gas. Sarin gas attack killed hundreds of people in the areas of Damascus that were controlled by rebels. UN investigators determined that missiles packed with sarin were fired into civilian areas while people were sleeping. The US and others blamed the Assad regime for the attack.

**August 31, 2013:** Obama announced that he would ask the Congress for authorization to strike back against the Syrian government, but the Republican-controlled legislature failed to act.

UN investigators looked for traces of chemical weapons.

**September 27, 2013:** The UN Security Council threatened to use force against Syria if it didn't destroy its chemical weapon stockpile. By mid-October, Syria signed the Chemical Weapons Convention;

this prohibited it from producing, stockpiling or using chemical weapons.

**June 23, 2014:** The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) announced that it had removed all of the Syrian government's chemical weapons. But government opponents said that the Assad regime had hidden chemical weapon supplies.

**September 23, 2014:** The US launched limited airstrikes against "Islamic State" (IS) militants inside Syria.

**August 7, 2015:** The UN Security Council authorized the OPCW and UN experts to investigate new reports that Assad had. This time he was suspected of repeatedly using chlorine gas in opposition areas populated by civilians.

### **Russia begins bombing:**

**September 30, 2015:** After providing military aid behind the scenes since the war's inception, Russia actively had a conflict. The Russian air force carried out relentless bombing attacks against Assad opponents and was also accused of deliberately bombing civilian targets, including hospitals. A civil war that had been deadlocked for four-and-a-half years began to move steadily in favor of the Assad regime.

**August 24, 2016:** The joint OPCW-UN panel determined that the Syrian military used chlorine gas in three separate attacks against its opponents - two of which were carried out by helicopters. But investigators also determined that IS militants also used mustard gas.

**February 28, 2017:** Russia and China rejected UN Security Council resolution calling for sanctions against the Syrian government in response to its use of chemical weapons.

**April 4, 2017:** At least 58 people were killed in the town of Khan Sheikhoun. Victims showed the signs of a chemical weapon attack. Witnesses claimed that the attack was carried out by Russian or Syrian jets, but both Moscow and Damascus denied the allegations.



**April 6, 2017:** The US fired a barrage of cruise missiles at the military base. US President Donald Trump, who campaigned as an isolationist and a populist, defended the attack, calling it a "vital national security interest of the United States."

**May 9, 2017:** Trump approved military plans to arm the Kurdish YPG as part of the effort to retake the Syrian city of Raqqa from IS militants. The move infuriated NATO. Washington regarded the YPG crucial to defeat the IS in Syria. But Ankara viewed the group as an extension of the Kurdish PKK militant group, which was (and by Washington) considered a terrorist organization. But without a UN Security Council referral to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, the commission's relentless work appeared to be in vain. Efforts to send the commission's work to the ICC had been vetoed by permanent Security Council members, Russia and China. It was out of frustration with that political stalemate that commission member Carla del Ponte announced in August 2017 that she would be quitting the commission.

**July 7, 2017:** Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed to a limited ceasefire in three war-torn provinces in southwest Syria.

**July 9, 2017:** The ceasefire was declared.

**July 23, 2017:** Syrian warplanes bombed the suburbs of Damascus, just one day after the military forces had declared a cessation of hostilities in the area.

## **Key Players**

### **Turkey**

The Turkish government has strongly opposed President Assad's government ever since the start of the uprising in Syria. As the key supporter of the rebel forces, Turkey has hosted more than 2 million refugees and allowed rebel groups, arms shipments, and refugees to pass through its territory.

## **The United States**

The U.S. is willing to work with Iran and Russia and continue the fight against ISIS; however, it will not allow Syria to go back to the prewar status quo. Though the U.S. is strongly convinced that Assad is responsible for the widespread atrocities and that Assad needs to go, the U.S. acknowledges the fact that there should be a peaceful negotiation settlement to end the civil war and form a transitional administration. The U.S. currently supports the National Coalition for Syrian Revolution and Opposition Force. Though President Donald Trump had previously condemned military involvement in Syria during the Obama Administration, this April he launched an air strike against Assad-aligned forces at a Syrian airbase as a response to the use of chemical weapons.

## **Russia**

Russia is one of the main supporters of the current Assad government, and whether the regime continues to exist depends on Russia's aids. With its veto powers within the UN Security Council, Russia has blocked Security Council resolutions that would have weakened the regime; moreover, it has provided the Syrian military forces with weapons and has launched air strikes against rebels, stating that it intended to strike "all terrorists".

## **Iran**

Iran is one of the primary financial supporters of Assad's Alawite-dominated government, spending billions of dollars each year and providing military advisers and subsidized weapons, as well as lines of credit and oil transfers. The main reason why Iran aids the Syrian government is because Syria is the main transit point for Iranian weapon shipments to the Lebanese Shia Islamist movement Hezbollah. Iran may have influenced Hezbollah to send fighters to

support the regime, but it also suggested a peaceful transition in Syria in October 2015.

## **The Islamic State**

When the pro-democracy rebels revolted against the Syrian Government, Assad released a group of imprisoned jihadists into the civil war to tarnish the reputation of the rebels so that they could not gain Syrians that were protesting Russian military involvement.

The Islamic state began as a branch of the terrorist group al-Qaeda which led the Iraqi Insurgency in 2006. They survived in the fall of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, moving further west and finding an opportunity to gain a strong presence in Syria after the Civil War began. It was known as ISIS, or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Assad tolerated the rise of the Islamic State in Syria because it took attention away from his regime and weakened the rebels. The Islamic State has been able to gain control over several large territories in Syria, violating the rights and killing thousands of innocent civilians and sparking foreign attacks on the region.

## **Chair's Notes:**

As the chairs of the Political Committee in OSJ MUN 19 we highly recommend you to act according to your countries' previously mentioned policies. We acknowledge the harmful and damaging effects of war. Nevertheless, you need to stick to your country's hostile and opportunist policies as we need to keep the committee as realistic as possible.

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