

**SECURITY COUNCIL:
DISCUSSING THE ISSUE OF THE
SYRIAN CIVIL WAR**

*John Mannion and Martijn van
Elst*



Introduction:

The Syrian civil war started on the 15th of March 2011, due to severe public unrest. Public outrage began when members of the police opened fire on peaceful protestors at the government's order. The war itself began with a rebellion against the rule of President Bashar al-Assad, but the conflict soon escalated as more parties began supporting either side. Many more parties were created within the warzone, each with their own motivations and goals. The primary conflict is between the rebels fighting against Assad's rule and Assad's forces. However, multiple countries have taken part in the conflict, turning it into a proxy war.

Explanation of key terms:

ISIS/ISIL: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria - an extremist jihadist terrorist group who seek to create their own caliphate, or independent state.

FSA: The Free Syrian Army, who are the main group of rebels fighting Assad's regime.

Proxy war: a war where instead of directly coming into conflict, two opponents support different sides of another conflict.

Chemical Weapon: a specialized munition that uses chemicals formulated to inflict death or harm on humans. Nerve gas, tear gas and pepper spray are three modern examples of chemical weapons.

Background Information:

Before the conflict, many Syrians were complaining about high unemployment and a lack of freedom. The event which caused the uproar and started the war took place in 2011. In the city of Deraa there was a peaceful protest after 15 school children were arrested, and reportedly tortured, for writing anti-government graffiti on a wall. The government responded angrily to the peaceful protests and on March 18th 2011, the army opened fire on protesters. The following day, they also shot at mourners attending the victims' funerals. Many people were shocked and angry, and soon this unrest spread to other parts of the country, causing a rebellion. At first, people just wanted democracy and freedom, but soon also wanted President Assad to resign. A portion of the Syrian army defected and joined the rebels, calling themselves the "Free Syrian Army". The rebellion became a civil war.

Multiple extremist groups began to take part in the war, supporting the FSA. This made it more difficult for foreign powers to support them, as doing so would also support terrorism. At the same time, Syrian Kurdish groups seeking autonomy took advantage of the chaos and informally seceded from Syria, coming into conflict with Assad.

It was after this that Syria became a proxy war. Assad's ally, Iran, supported him with funding for his military. This evoked a response from Saudi Arabia, Iran's enemy, who provided similar support to the FSA via Turkey. Iran and Saudi Arabia have long had hostile relations with one another and used the Syrian war as an excuse to further their own ends. In 2012, Hezbollah, a Lebanese militia backed by Iran, entered the country and fought alongside Assad. Saudi Arabia countered by sending yet more supplies to the rebels, this time through Jordan, who, much like Turkey and Saudi Arabia, opposed Assad's rule.

More than a year after the war began, the UN and Arab League put the Kofi Annan ceasefire in place. Both the Assad regime and FSA initially agreed to the ceasefire; however, it quickly fails as they both resume fighting soon after.

From here, the war escalated dramatically. In 2013, the USA authorised an order to have the CIA train and arm Syrian rebels, giving them the upper hand. Not long after, Assad used chemical weaponry on civilians and combatants alike, leading to worldwide outrage. The USA prepared a missile strike in response to the chemical weapons but refrained from doing so when Russia defended Assad's regime by encouraging them to hand over any more chemical weapons in their possession. This drew a clear divide between the USA and Russia, with the US supporting the rebels and Russia backing Assad.

In 2014, a portion of Al-Qaeda, who were also fighting, break away, forming ISIS. They immediately went about fighting rebel and Kurdish groups, seeking to claim their own territory. Its extreme use of violence alienated many of the war's many nations against it. The USA quickly made it their primary enemy, turning their attention away from Assad's regime.

In 2015 Turkey began bombing Kurdish groups in both Iraq and Syria, indicating that the US is the only major nation whose main priority is combating ISIS. That same year, Russia provided support to Assad by landing dozens of military aircraft in a Russian-held military base, under the excuse that they intended to bomb ISIS. As it would turn out, they only bombed rebels fighting Assad.

In 2016, Donald Trump replaced Barack Obama as President of the USA. This is followed by Assad, with the aid of Russia, reclaiming the city of Aleppo, which was the rebels' final stronghold.

In 2017, Assad once again used chemical weapons against his people, killing 80, including 20 children. President Trump reacted, firing multiple missiles at a Syrian airbase. This was a critical part of the war, as it was the first instance of the USA directly attacking Assad's regime.

Since then, the rebels have steadily been driven back as Assad and his allies reclaim more and more territory. This is also likely the cause of the withdrawal of all American troops from the region, leaving the rebels devoid of their biggest supporter. ISIS has been almost completely eradicated, but the war continues, and it is difficult to say who will emerge as the victor.

Major Players involved:

Syria: currently under the rule of President Assad, who is responsible for the beginning of the war. Steadily reclaiming territory from rebel groups, who are their main opposition.

Russia: one of Assad's biggest allies; their close bonds have helped Assad retain power. They provide Syria with troops, finances, and military equipment.

Iran: assisting the Syrian government in combatting the rebel groups. Provides military aid, and also backs Hezbollah.

United States of America: assisted the rebels fighting ISIS during Obama's time as President by having the CIA and Pentagon train them. Once Trump was elected, he directly attacked Assad's regime following a chemical weapon attack by bombing an airbase. The USA is currently withdrawing all forces from Syria.

France: also fired missiles to destroy what they claim to be chemical weapon factories in Syria. Supports what they consider to be 'moderate' rebels.

United Kingdom: fired missiles to destroy what they say are chemical weapon factories in Syria.

Turkey: has taken in many refugees seeking peace. Turkey supports the rebels but has made repeated attacks upon the Kurdish groups in north Syria, stating that they are terrorist organisations.

Lebanon: has also taken in refugees. The militia "Hezbollah", which supports President Assad, is Lebanese in origin.

ISIS/ISIL: an extremist group of terrorists seeking to create their own sovereign within Syria and Iraq. They have lost most of the power and military resources, and have been declared defeated by many countries.

Free Syrian Army (FSA): the primary group of rebels fighting against Assad's regime.

Saudi Arabia: supports rebel groups by supplying them with weaponry and financial aid through Turkey and Jordan.

Israel: although its official position is to stay neutral, it has launched several missile strikes.

Iraq: neighbouring country who are also involved due to ISIS having claimed territory in their country.

Timeline of events:

2011, March 18 - The Assad regime opens fire on peaceful protestors, leading to country-wide outrage and the beginning of the civil war.

2011, July - The rebels take up arms, and several units of the military join them, forming the Free Syrian Army.

2011 - Iran and Saudi Arabia become involved by supporting the Assad regime and FSA respectively.

2012 - Hezbollah enters the conflict, fighting on behalf of Assad.

2012, April-May - The Kofi Annan ceasefire, suggested by the Arab League and UN, is put in place, but quickly fails.

2013 - The USA begins training rebels, and Russia shows its support for Assad after he uses chemical weapons.

2014 - ISIS is formed, and begins attacking rebel groups.

2015 - Turkey attacks Kurdish groups, and Russia takes an active role in the war.

2016 - Donald Trump is elected as President of the USA. Assad begins reclaiming territory.

2017 - Assad uses chemical weapons again, inciting a missile strike from the USA.

2018 - ISIS loses power; the USA announces its withdrawal in December.

2019 - Present - ISIS, despite being much weakened, continues its attacks; the USA begins its withdrawal.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue:

The Kofi Annan peace plan for Syria was launched in March 2012 by the Arab League and the UN. The Syrian government was willing to comply with the peace plan at first, but new signs of war and statements of politicians made it clear that they were not going to stand by their word, and the initiative eventually failed.

On 27th February 2016 at 00:00 (Damascus Time) there was a successful ceasefire between most parties, apart from terrorist organisations such as the Islamic State. This ceasefire was set into action by the UN with the help of the US and Russia.

References:

The Syrian Civil War: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian_Civil_War#Background

Timeline of the War:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_the_Syrian_Civil_War#Trump_announces_US_withdrawal;_Iraq_strikes_ISIL_targets_\(September%E2%80%93December_2018\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_the_Syrian_Civil_War#Trump_announces_US_withdrawal;_Iraq_strikes_ISIL_targets_(September%E2%80%93December_2018))

Al Jazeera. "Kofi Annan's Six-Point Plan for Syria." News | Al Jazeera, Al Jazeera, 27 Mar. 2012, www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/03/2012327153111767387.html/.

Hamilton, Douglas. "Text of Annan's Six-Point Peace Plan for Syria." Reuters, Thomson Reuters, 4 Apr. 2012, www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-ceasefire/text-of-annans-six-point-peace-plan-for-syria-idUSBRE8330HJ20120404.

"World Report 2019: Rights Trends in Syria." Human Rights Watch, 23 Jan. 2019, www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/syria.

"Syria's war: Who is fighting and why." Vox, 7 Apr. 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFpanWNgfQY>

"Syria: Seven years of war explained - BBC News." BBC News, 9 Mar. 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CoL0L_DbuQQ

<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/08/iranian-military-involvement-in-the-battle-for-aleppo.php>