

Committee: The Security Council

Issue: Achieving Stability in Syria

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most pivotal problems that humanity has never really surpassed is the problem of war and the violence that a war causes. One of the greatest wars of our century could easily be the Syrian civil war and its effects can be seen in our everyday lives, either when we watch the daily news, or when we see the refugees that come to Europe in search for a better future; but most importantly peace and security.

The Syrian civil war, also characterized as a proxy war, is actually a fairly old and generally long war as there has been an ongoing conflict in Syria for more than the last 5 years and of course after that period of time the death count is nearly half a million including children, women and elders. Also, in that period of time more than 4.5 million refugees have travelled extremely long distances to save their lives.

As of now, the war is being fought by four major parties, the Syrian government, the Syrian democratic forces and the Salafi jihadists groups -the most important of them are Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant- said to be supported by some Arab governments. Of course, as in most of wars, there are several foreign and powerful countries that act behind these fractions. These include countries like the USA, France, Turkey, Russia, UK and China.

The Syrian civil war has seen a variety of war crimes as it has been supported that all parties that participated in the conflict have committed war crimes such as murder, rape, torture and even enforced disappearances. There have also been accusations on several parties of using civilian suffering as a method. Furthermore, the long-lasting conflict has led to a great humanitarian crisis as around three fourths of the population of Syria do not have access to adequate drinking water, one out of three don't get sufficient nutrition, around 2 million children don't get educated and fourth fifths of the people live in poverty.

It's sure that this is a matter of great importance and as it has been seen in the past it is the job of the Security Council to cope with and maybe even at some point end this conflict that has jeopardized so many lives in its extent.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Chemical weapons

A general definition could be that they are weapons used in the form of a bomb or a shell that contain toxic and most of the times lethal chemicals. They are used in order to kill or harm infantry targets. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) states: "The term chemical weapon may also be applied to any toxic chemical or its precursor that can cause death, injury, temporary incapacitation or sensory irritation through its chemical action. Munitions or other delivery devices designed to deliver chemical weapons, whether filled or unfilled, are also considered weapons themselves."

War crime

The term war crime is a term that we cannot define with ease as warfare has changed and developed through the years and especially after the first world war. A general definition could be that war crimes are crimes committed against an enemy, prisoners of war or generally a subject in wartime that go against international agreements and laws.

Humanitarian crisis

A humanitarian crisis is an event or a series of events, caused by internal or external forces, that pose a threat to the health, safety and general wellbeing of the population or a big part of the population of a country. The characteristic that distinguishes humanitarian crises from other issues is that in order to cope with events of that degree not only local and national responses are needed but also international aid from countries and organizations.

Proxy war

A proxy war is defined as a war that actually is being instigated by other major powers which themselves do not get involved directly in the combat. One example of a proxy war was the Vietnam war between the USA and the USSR. Generally, proxy wars have really destabilizing effects and result to many casualties as their length and their intensity are increased by their external support.

Civil war

A civil war is a war that is fought by different groups of people that are living inside the same country. They usually happen for ideological reasons in regards to politics but also independence for a specific region or taking control of the specific country. Civil wars are high intensity conflicts and may result to many casualties but also a large consumption of

resources that the country has. Most of modern civil wars include different interventions from other countries.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In March 2011 anti-government protests broke out in Syria inspired by similar to the Middle East and North Africa, whose purpose was to overthrow the regime.

On March 18th a group of teenagers in the city of Dar'ā was arrested and tortured after painting revolutionary slogans on their school walls. Protests began to arise and soon after, government security forces interfered killing several protests and making this a national issue.

Dar'ā (Daraa) is a city in the southwestern Syria, close to the borders with Jordan and 90 kilometers south of Damascus. Its population is 97,969 according to the 2004 census. The city of Dar'ā played an important role in the uprising.

The spokesman of Assad denied that the government forces killed protesters and announced that were intended to implement political changes. The announcement was rejected by the opposition. On March 25th rallies were held in several cities that were violently controlled by government forces. However, the protests continued. A few days later, when Assad made his first public appearance since the tensions had started, he claimed that the protests were a foreign conspiracy but accepted some of the demands of the demonstrators. However, he rejected the opposition's call for quick restructuring and claimed that there would be gradual reform.

Demonstrations continued to occur sporadically in various parts of the country and the government continued to attribute them to foreign conspiracies and religious tensions. The Syrian government made some concessions to conservative Muslims and the Kurds: they closed the unique casino in Syria, compelled the female teachers to wear a veil covering their face and also established a New Year festival of the Kurds as a national holiday. However as protests and tensions grew, violence exercised by the government also grew resulting in an increase of killings. Various organizations, human rights groups and other world leaders called for the end of war and violence.

As security forces continued to use violence, Assad appointed a new cabinet. In their attempt to suppress the protests, they implemented a law requiring people to obtain permission from the state before starting a demonstration. The new interior minister said that the state will continue to see the protests as a threat to public safety.

On 22 April the soldiers of the government shot 75 people who had gathered for prayer. Despite global calls for stopping violence, the Syrian government continued trying by brutal means to suppress the protests by sending forces to the cities of Dar'ā, Bāniyās, and Homs. In Dar'ā the government forces cut off water and electricity, which had a dramatic impact on the lives of the city residents.

In early May, the anti-government protests arrived in Damascus. Protests in the city center were suppressed with violence. Therefore, the EU applied a cancellation of flights to and from Syria while in May, the Turkish Prime Minister condemned the tactics of the Syrian government and showed its support for the opposition by hosting a meeting of its members.

On 6th June it became known that 120 Syrian soldiers had been tortured and killed by armed rebels in the city Jisr al-Shughūr. The inhabitants were skeptical and argued that the soldiers were killed by the government forces because they refused to kill protesters. At the same time, the Syrian army launched a heavy attack on the city, causing the inhabitants to emigrate to Turkey. Similar incidents took place in the cities Ḥamāh and Latakia.

In November 2011, the Syrian government agreed to the Arab League peace plan according to which they had to stop all forms of violence, withdraw all troops that were dispatched to many major cities in Syria and release all political prisoners. Many considered this act suspicious; these suspicions were confirmed a few days later when a new outbreak of violence against demonstrators occurred.

After great international pressure the Syrian government agreed to the second Arab League peace plan, on December 19th of 2011, according to which it had to accept a delegation of monitors that would verify compliance with the conditions of the agreement. Despite the fact that the violence continued, the effect of the delegation of monitors was positive. In January 2012 the reliability of systems with monitors fell and the plan was cancelled.

The rise of the Islamic State

In 2013 and 2014, Jihadi groups took advantage of the war in order to receiving recognition and promote their message for the domination of Islam and Sharia law between Islamist or nationalist opposition and the international Salafi – jihadism they represent. They attacked both government and rebel forces, which resulted in some serious territorial gains in eastern Syria. These groups consisted of members of rebels groups but also fighters from other Islam countries and was called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)¹. The stated purpose of ISIS is to establish a renewed caliphate, or rule according to the earliest leaders in

¹ Other names include Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or simply Islamic State.

seventh-century Islam, and to become the highest authority in the Islamic world, destroying all it considers the enemies of Islam. The group is infamous for mass murder of civilians, graphic videos of beheadings of captives, and the destruction of irreplaceable archaeological treasures. By June 2014 Islamic State forces had already declared a “caliphate” in a territory from Aleppo to the eastern Iraqi province of Diyala. It is also important to mention that in May 2015 the Islamic state forces seized the ancient city of Palmyra destroying many monuments on this pre-Islamic World Heritage site.

But this uprising didn’t come unnoticed by foreign countries. In September 2015, Russia carried out its first air strikes in Syria. After the air strikes they stated that they targeted the Islamic State group, but the West and Syrian opposition supported that it overwhelmingly targeted anti-Assad rebels. The victories of the Islamic State in Syria as well as the threat it posed to the West resulted in US-led bombings by various states such as France, the United Kingdom and other NATO forces. The interference of western powers into the Syrian conflict and their attacks against ISIS caused some big and horrific terrorist attacks in major European cities (such as Paris). In August 2016 some Turkish forces crossed into Syria in order to help rebel groups fight back the Islamic State militants and Kurdish-led rebels. Furthermore, in March 2016 the Syrian government managed to push back and retake Palmyra from the Islamic state forces with Russian air assistance.

The war in Aleppo

One of the major battles in the Syrian civil war and one that keeps scaling upwards regarding tension until today is the battle of Aleppo. This battle is of course an ongoing military confrontation in the city of Aleppo, which is the biggest city in Syria and one of great geostrategic and economic importance. It has been characterized by its combatants as “mother of battles” or “Syria’s Stalingrad” because of its scale. In September 2016 Russia along with the Syrian government launched bombardment of the city with a massive use of incendiary bombs. It has been estimated by human rights organizations that half the casualties are children. Also, the battle has caused catastrophic destruction to the Old City of Aleppo, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Recognizing ISIS as a common threat and agreeing that the countries first priority should be ISIS defeat the United States of America and the Russian Federation agreed on a ceasefire in September. However, a couple of days later the deal was violated by both sides as numerous bombings were carried out. It is true that the issue is not simple to resolve as the interests and policies of the involved states are totally opposed, however the severity of the conflict, its implications for the international community as well as its effects such as the

humanitarian crisis within the Syrian borders or the refugee crisis in its neighboring countries and in Europe make it one of the most important problems of the current world.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Syria (Government)

In 2000, Bashar al-Assad took the presidential position after the death of Hafez al-Assad. Assad's government opposed the invasion of Iraq by the USA in 2003 and the Qatar-Turkey pipeline in 2009. After the long lasting protest in 2011, the government responded with the killing and the imprisonment of hundreds of demonstrators and thus starting the civil war.

Russian Federation

Russia was one of the major supporters of the Syrian government because of Russia's interests in the country. They have vetoed on resolutions of the UNSC in support of President Assad and they continue to supply them with weapons. In September 2015 Russia bombed Syria aiming to destroy IS, other terrorist groups and rebels.

The United States of America

The US government accuses President Assad for causing the civil war and they support the opposition alliance. They believe that a solution must be found through negotiations to end the war and maintain transitional administration. Since September 2014 the US have carried out airstrikes against IS and other jihadist groups.

Saudi Arabia

The government of Saudi Arabia calls for the resignation of the Assad administration while it supports that there can be no resolution to the problem with Assad. They are supporters of the rebels and provide them with military and economic assistance. Saudi Arabia has multiply called for the termination of bombings in Syria as they have been proved to cause civilian deaths as well. While disagreeing with various decisions and tactics of the United States they have supported their fight against the Islamic State.

Turkey

The government of Turkey has always been against President Assad and supports the opposition. As a result of the terrible humanitarian crisis in Syria many Syrians decided to flee the country towards Europe, therefore Turkey has hosted more than 2 million refugees. The

policy to allow entry and exit of individuals from their borders has helped with the millions of people fleeing Syria, but has led to gatherings of more supporters of IS in Syria.

Iran

Iran is one of the closest allies of the Syrian government. The alliance of the two states dates back in the Iran-Iraq war when Syria supported Iran in its war against Iraq's President Hussein. Syria has also been supporting Iran with supplying Hezbollah with arms. During the Syrian civil war Iran has been trying to secure President Assad in power.

Free Syrian Army

The formation of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) occurred in 2011 by army personnel based in Turkey and they were led by Col Riad al-Asaad. Its purpose is the defense of citizens and demonstrators from government violence and the end of the civil war.

Islamic Front

The Islamic Front is a group of 40.000-60.000 rebels created in 2013. This rebel group is independent of any other group of revolutionaries and their aim is to overthrow the regime in Syria. It consists out of some groups that were joined in the Syrian Islamic Liberation Front. When it was created it operated under the command of Shura Council Leader, Ahmed Abu Issa.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA)

Humanitarian assistance for the people of Syria comes from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which implements the Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP) that costs 1.4 billion US dollars for citizens affected by the war in Syria.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
15-18 March 2011	Protest in every part of Syria calling for democratic reforms. Police forces open fire on a protest.
July 2012	A bombing at the Syrian national security building in Damascus kills officials
Summer 2012	Fighting spreads in Aleppo, the former Syrian capital

March 2013	The number of the registered Syrian refugees is more than one million
August 2013	The regime is accused of killing more than 1400 people with chemical weapons in two rebel-held zones near Damascus
September 2013	Around a dozen rebel groups abandon the Syrian National Coalition and reject its calls for a civil, democratic government
January 2014	Infighting among rebels, pitting a variety of Islamists groups and moderate functions against the al-Qaida-breakaway
June 2014	Syrians in government areas vote in presidential election and Assad wins with 88.7 percent
September 2015	Russia begins launching airstrikes in Syria in support of Assads forces
November 2015	Seventeen nations meeting in Vienna adopt a timeline for a transition plan in Syria
February 2016	USA and Russia announce that they will cease fire partially in Syria
March 2016	Russian President announces that his armed forces will begin withdrawing from Syria

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

- 4 October 2011: The aim of the resolution was to threaten the Syrian government with targeted sanctions given continued military actions against protestors. However, this resolution was vetoed by Russia and China.
- 31 January 2012: The aim of the resolution was the instant end of military actions, the support for the Arab League peace plan and the request for Assad to withdraw his forces. It was vetoed by Russia and China.
- 27 September 2013: The aim of the resolution was for the Syrian government to abandon any chemical weapons. This resolution was passed.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

United Nations:

The United Nations through the 5 years that the Syrian Civil war has been taking place has arranged a number of meetings, made new commissions and took measures in order to eliminate these issues. One of these measures is the creation of a new commission named, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. It was adopted in 22 March 2011. Its main role is to conduct an international, transparent, independent and prompt investigation into abuses and violations of international law, with a view to hold to account those responsible for violations and abuses, including those that may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes.

However, the existence of the veto power has not allowed the Security Council to take any effective measure to terminate the conflict between the Assad regime and the rebels. They managed to pass resolutions related to humanitarian assistance and the issue of chemical weapons' use during the conflict, but the opposed policies of mainly the US and Russia do not help in a soon resolution of the conflict.

Arab League peace plan for Syria:

On 2 November 2011 the Syrian government agreed to end any military actions, to remove forces, release prisoners and begin a dialog with the opposition. Between 6-13 November 2011 the Syrian government breached the agreement and 300 protestors were killed. The Arab League pressured Syria to implement the peace plan by 16 November or else they would suspend Syria's membership to the League. Syria's failure to meet the requirements of the other Arab States resulted in their suspension.

On 19 December 2011 the Syrian government agreed to a second Arab League peace plan that requested the removal of both the Syrian army and the rebels, the release of prisoners, the access of Arab League monitors to Syria and the start of a dialog with the opposition. The Syrian government defaulted on its agreement once again and the Arab League asked the UN to intervene in Syria.

G8:

The Syrian civil war was discussed in the 39th G8 summit and the G8 countries decided on supporting the Geneva II peace conference, on providing funds for humanitarian aid in Syria and on banishing Syria from actors linked to terrorism, such as Al Qaeda. However, Russia's disagreement in regard to the Syrian civil war but even more for their involvement in the Crimean Crisis resulted in its suspension. Therefore, since Russia, Syria's strongest ally, is no longer a member of the G8 makes a resolution of the topic through the G8 impossible.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Actually finding solutions to problems like wars is one of the most difficult things that diplomats and politicians will ever have to cope with. The Syrian civil war is a war going on for five years and is easily the biggest conflict in our century so far. These are some basic key ideas that could be thought in order to put this war into an end.

- The withdrawal of all other-country armies from the region. It should be noted that this war is characterized as a Proxy war and thus outside forces are having their impact on the country. This should be stopped in order to achieve stability and peace. The only outside intervention that could be allowed would be the UN army forces in order to maintain security for the civilians and not take part in armed conflicts with other rebel groups.
- UN administered presidential and parliamentary elections. This is something that would actually ensure some “future proofing” after the cease of conflict. One of the dominant reasons that this war started is that the people wanted democratic government and the present government didn’t accept that. Also, by being UN administered it can be ensured that the results will be 100% true and not a result of a corrupt organization that would work on the votes.
- Gathering UN volunteers in order to help civilians after the war. Always after wars there is a state where the disasters of the war are not letting civilians continue with their lives. By getting volunteers to go and help in these regions small schools for kids to go and get educated can be created or sanitation, healthcare and nutrition to people in these areas should be provided. This will help in the humanitarian crisis that is going on in the Syrian region and as the UN it is one of the biggest priorities.
- Member States should also agree on a common plan to terminate ISIS’ actions in Syria and Iraq since it has been accepted by both sides that the organization is posing a threat to the world regardless of their policy on the issue of Syria. An effective ceasefire or unilateral missions could possibly ensure that the regions captured by the Islamic State can be recaptured and their terrorist activities are combated. If this is the case it will be easier for the international community to focus on the civil war and its implications.

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