

**Committee: Security Council**

**Issue: The Situation in the Middle East**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Situation in the Middle East is one of today's most confusing situations. The conflicts that are taking place in the Middle East are some of the most brutal and challenging conflicts of the last decades. However, what makes this conflict so challenging are the parties involved in it. This is the main reason why the Middle East has been an area of tension for over 15 years. The conflict the International Community is facing today is the result of another conflict which took place many decades before, the Soviet War in Afghanistan as well as the U.S. War in Iraq. The combination of these two conflicts and the vents of the Arab Spring have led to the Syrian Civil War and to general conflict in the areas between Syria Iraq and Turkey.

The Soviet War in Afghanistan has been the reason why ISIS exists today and is indirectly responsible for its actions and its creation. Also, the U.S. War in Iraq and Afghanistan are the conflicts that destabilized the region of the Middle East, making it an area where conflict would be inevitable at some point. The final event that marked the start of the Middle East conflict as we know it today is the Arab Spring, which inspired the Syrians to seek change, thus leading to a civil war.

Possibly the most challenging aspect of this issue is the Syrian Civil War which is directly connected to the Islamic State. The international community hasn't been able to resolve this issue and its predecessors because the major countries involved weren't able to co-operate in order to fight a common enemy, the Islamic State. Therefore, the Security Council is now called upon not only to end the civil war but also to find a way to eliminate ISIS which spreads terror across the world.

The civil war in Syria reached its peak after President Bashar Al-Assad was accused of using chemical weapons and the war became more brutal. Currently about 300,000 people are cut off from humanitarian assistance according to the UN. The Syrian capital Damascus is now a battlefield and the President refuses to step down. However, the rebels also refuse to make compromises and the war drags on.

## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

### Terrorism

Terrorism is the “unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims”<sup>1</sup>. In the case of Middle East, terrorism is used by ISIS due to its weakness in the Middle East; they aim to strike back with terrorism and they have been very successful. Beyond the ISIS planned strikes, some lone-wolfs, mostly in the United States are inspired by ISIS propaganda and strike without their guidance. However, lone-wolf attacks weren't as effective as planned attacks.

### Civil War

A war between citizens of the same country. The reasons behind the Syrian Civil War are mostly concerning the freedom of people and is a response of some Syrian people feeling oppressed by the government.

### War Crime

“An act carried out during the conduct of a war that violates accepted international rules of war”<sup>2</sup>.

### Chemical Weapons

Chemical Weapons are weapons of mass destruction. In Syria, the Chemical Weapon used contained a high percentage of Sarin Gas. The use of all Weapons of Mass Destruction in international conflict is prohibited by the Geneva Protocol.

### Sanctions

“Measures taken by a state to coerce another to conform to an international agreement or norms of conduct, typically in the form of restrictions on trade or official sporting participation. A threatened penalty for disobeying a law or rule.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Terrorism - Definition of Terrorism in English | Oxford Dictionaries.” Oxford Dictionaries | English, Oxford Dictionaries, <en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/terrorism>.

<sup>2</sup> “War Crime - Definition of War Crime in English | Oxford Dictionaries.” Oxford Dictionaries | English, Oxford Dictionaries, <en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/war\_crime>.

<sup>3</sup> “Sanction - Definition of Sanction in English | Oxford Dictionaries.” Oxford Dictionaries | English, Oxford Dictionaries, <en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/sanction>.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Syrian Civil War, as mentioned in the introduction, is the indirect result of a group of events and conflicts that have theoretically ended combined with the actions of the Syrian government and the rise of ISIS.

### **The Soviet War in Afghanistan and the creation of Jihadist terror**

ISIS' roots lie in the previously mentioned Soviet War in Afghanistan. The Jihadist fighters of ISIS today are what remains from the Mujahedeen Jihadist Group in Afghanistan. The war was fought between the Soviet Union who supported the communist government and the tribal warlords who were in full disagreement with the communist policies seeing the war as a religious war between them and the Christian/Atheist Soviet Union. This led to the unification of regional powers and the creation of the Mujahedeen, an Islamic organization opposed to Soviet rule. After the Soviet War in Afghanistan, Bin Laden and Zarqawi, two former Mujahedeen co-operated to attack the U.S. (9/11 attacks). Bin Laden, who had already created Al-Qaeda fled to Pakistan and Zarqawi to northern Iraq.

### **The destabilization of the Middle East and the basis for the creation of ISIS**

The crisis in the Middle East is rooted in the 90's and at the start of the new millennium it did seem that the region was at the brink of a crisis. Following the Gulf War, Iraqi government started to show great weakness and lost its credibility to the people. The first sign of destabilization was the uprisings in Iraq which showed the people's disappointment towards Saddam Hussein's government. Then, the President of the United States George Bush deployed U.S. troops in Iraq, declaring "war on terror" following the 9/11 attacks. The former Mujahedeen fighters alongside disarmed Iraqi soldiers joined Zarqawi and started spreading terror all over Iraq. This was the result of the more power Zarawi gained due to the disarmament of Iraqi troops and police men during the U.S. war in Iraq. This conflict set the stage for a larger conflict, a more brutal one; this would be the Syrian Civil War. Meanwhile, Al-Qaeda seeing their organization lose influence, proposed an alliance with Zarqawi. Zarqawi accepted Bin-Laden's proposal and the Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) was formed. Prior and during the co-operation with Al-Qaeda, the AQI was much similar to ISIS; they kidnapped foreigners and blackmailed the governments and launched terrorist attacks towards civilians mainly in Iraqi ground. In 2006 Zarqawi was killed in an air strike by the U.S. and AQI was greatly weakened leading to the creation of new counterparts which remained

relatively inactive such as the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) and the Mujahedeen Shura Council (MSC). Many former AQI members were imprisoned.

### **The Arab Spring and the start of the Syrian Civil War**

In 2011, the Arab spring started and many nations tried to overthrow their regimes in search of more democratic governments. In Syria, a boy influenced by the Arab Spring decided to write anti-government slogans on his school wall. The Assad regime responded by arresting and torturing 15 young boys for the anti-government slogans. Soon after that, the Syrian people started to protest peacefully. Assad proposed measures to satisfy them but other nations, including the U.S., imposed sanctions on Syria asking for the resignation of President Assad.

### **The escalation of the Syrian Civil War and the creation of ISIS**

Assad, seeing his country falling apart, decided to release many prisoners including former AQI members and many Islamic fighters. At this point, the Syrian civil war took an unprecedented turn, when chemical weapons' attacks were carried out in opposition-led areas. Western Nations and the opposition accused the Assad regime of being responsible for the attack, while Assad and Russia refused the accusations stating that the opposition itself carried out the attacks as propaganda. As the conflict further escalated the ISI was reformed, becoming ISIS and reuniting with the released former AQI members and Islamic fighters. The violent war started around 2013 when mostly the US and its allies decided to take action following Assad's continuous violence against the rebels/protesters. Since then, the Security Council and the GA have been trying to ensure peace and all of the parties involved have proposed their plans for peace, however they largely disagree with each other.

### **Use of Chemical Weapons, Presidential Elections and escalation of conflict**

The use of chemical weapons was first reported by the U.S. in April 2013 and in August of the same year, the UN and the US call for investigations on the matter. It's worth mentioning that the Syrian government threatened that they will use chemical weapons if exposed to external aggression in June 2012. Following the US and the UN calling for investigation several thousands of patients were examined with neurotoxic symptoms as a result of exposure to Sarin gas which is used in chemical weapons. Therefore, the Syrian government agreed to give up the weapons and started dismantling them shortly after. In 2014 Bashar al-Assad gets re-elected President, receiving more than 88% of the votes, this was considered by the West as a very suspicious event considering the protests of the people

which led to the civil war. Several countries opposed to the Syrian Government and Assad questioning the legitimacy of the elections, however there hasn't been a clear investigation about them. Following the elections, the U.S. and its allies launch air-campaigns against ISIS in Syria. Meanwhile there are further reports concerning the use of chemical weapons which specify their nature. In 2016, cessation of all hostile actions was agreed but was violated around a month later. Russia and U.S. accused each other of violating the agreement while one of the U.S.' strikes against ISIS killed Syrian soldiers instead. In the aftermath, the Russian President, Putin called for the withdrawal of Russian troops calling the mission semi-accomplished while the U.S. examined the possibility of a land invasion. At the same time, the Syrian government regained control over some major cities.

## **MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED**

### **Russian Federation**

The Russian Federation is one of the most active supporters of the Syrian government. Although it has condemned the use of chemical weapons, it continues to support Assad and doesn't question the legitimacy of the 2014 elections. Russia strongly supports Assad due to the ties of his father with the Soviet Union. When his son Bashar took over he strengthened the relations between the two countries thus making Russia a very important arms provider of Syria and made Syria a reliable country where Russia could build bases and station their troops. Russia actively opposes ISIS and the Free Syrian Army.

### **United States of America**

The United States have strongly opposed the Syrian Government and openly backed the Free Syrian Army. The reason behind opposing Assad is that the U.S. claims that Assad is feeding terrorism, oppressing his people and violating the laws of war and human rights, something which is just speculation and hasn't been confirmed. The U.S. is also strongly opposed to ISIS and has proceeded with many air-strikes. The U.S. have been leading the measures taken against Assad and have continuously proposed in the Security Council resolutions against Assad. Furthermore, the U.S. have seriously questioned the legitimacy of the 2014 elections.

### **Syrian Government**

The Syrian Government is led by President Assad and has been strongly opposed by the majority of the Syrian People. However, in 2014 the government held elections which

were won by Assad, with more than 88%. The result, as previously mentioned, has been heavily questioned. Assad has been accused of violating the laws of war by using chemical weapons against rebels. Assad and his government have also been accused of feeding terrorism when the Syrian government released extremists from prisons and urged them to fight alongside the rebels.

### **Free Syrian Army**

The Free Syrian Army (FSA) is an army formed in 2011 with the aim of eliminating the current Assad government. The Free Syrian Army is the clean form of rebels which has distanced itself from the extremist form of rebels, the Al-Nusra Front. They have been supported by the United States and many Gulf Arab States.

### **Al-Nusra Front/Jabhat Al-Nusra**

The Al-Nusra Front is a Syrian Jihadist rebel group which has been also strongly opposed to Assad. Its members include many Islamist extremists released from Syrian prisons by Assad and have affiliated themselves with Al-Qaeda. Their aim is to establish an Islamic State in Syria. They haven't gained much public support but are rumored to be funded by Qatar and Turkey. They currently have approximately 5.000 active members.

### **Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)/ Islamic Caliphate**

The Islamic State or Islamic Caliphate in Iraq and Syria is a group strongly opposed to both the Assad government and the opposition. Their goal is to establish an Islamic State in the Middle East and to hold under its shield all the Muslims of the world. They claim to have more than 100.000 fighters most of them coming from countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries. There are many theories concerning the funding of ISIS and it is one of the most crucial aspects of this organization.

### **Syrian Democratic Forces**

The Syrian Democratic forces are an alliance of Kurdish, Arab, Turkmen, Assyrian and Armenian militias mainly fighting against ISIS and other Jihadist groups in the Syrian and Iraqi regions. They have combined approximately 99.000 fighters and are backed by the United States.

## TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
March 2011	A group of young boys are arrested for writing anti-government slogans on their school's wall. This sparks continuous protests. The regime responds by promising a multi-party system and a salary increase.
April 2011	Assad proceeds with measures to make Syria a more democratic state. However, they weren't easily implemented and ended up not being implemented at all. Meanwhile protests start getting more intense.
May 2011	The United States impose a series of sanctions on Syrian government and senior officials.
September 2011	The EU also imposes a series of sanctions on Syria, including the cease of oil imports.
October 2011	The Syrian National Council is established with the aim of ending Assad's regime and establishing a democratic system. At this point, it is reported that Assad starts releasing former prisoners including Jihadists from Syrian prisons. Russia and China veto a UN resolution calling for a halt in the conflict.
November 2011	Arab League suspends Syrian membership, effective November 2011. The Arab League and Turkey impose sanctions on Assad and the Syrian Government.
December 2011	The Arab League and Syria agree on a plan to end violence in Syria.
January 2012	The Arab League decides to halt the mission in Syria because of the extreme violence.
February 2012	Russia and China veto a resolution condemning the action of the Syrian Government. The U.S. as well as Gulf Cooperation Council countries break all diplomatic ties with Syria. The UN GA passes a resolution supporting the plan for President Assad to step down. A constitutional reform is approved with a 90% in favor vote in a referendum.
June 2012	The Syrian Government threatens for the first time to use chemical weapons if Syria is exposed to external aggression.
August 2012	Syrian Prime Minister resigns and Assad appoints former Minister for Health as the new Prime Minister.
October 2012	Turkish Parliament authorizes the deployment of troops in Syria.
January 2013	Assad announces that he will not step down and will proceed with his plan for a new constitution.
February 2013	The UN SC estimates that the number of civilian casualties is about 70.000.

April 2013	The United States announce that they have evidence of Sarin, a chemical weapon being used in Syria.
May 2013	The UN reports 1.5 million Syrians displaced. EU nations end embargo of arms against the rebels in Syria. The US announce that Syria has crossed a red line with the use of sarin and that they will intensify their efforts to support the rebels.
August 2013	The UN and the US call for an investigation into the chemical weapons incident. UN SG Ban Ki-Moon denounces the use of chemical weapons and calls it a crime against humanity. 3.000 patients in Syrian hospitals have been suffering neurotoxic symptoms after the reported use of chemical weapons. UK's Parliament votes against military action in Syria.
September 2013	Syria agrees to give up chemical weapons.
October 2013	Syria starts to dismantle its chemical weapons.
June 2014	Bashar al-Assad gets re-elected receiving 88.7% of the votes.
September 2014	The United States and its allies launch airstrikes against ISIS in Syria.
March 2015	Further reports for the use of chemical weapons are released.
February 2016	A temporary cessation of hostile actions is agreed effective immediately.
March 2016	Russia starts withdrawing their troops from Syria.
September 2016	23 people are killed during an airstrike. Meanwhile the U.S. and Russia accuse each other of violating the ceasefire. U.S. airstrike aimed at ISIS, kills Syrian soldiers instead.
December 2016	Government regains control of Aleppo and Turkey agree with Russia on a ceasefire to evacuate civilians.

## UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

- 31 December 2016 S/RES/2336 This resolution welcomed efforts to start new political process by Russia and Turkey
- 21 December 2016 S/RES/2332 Renewal of authorization, until January 2018, for cross-border aid delivery.
- 19 December 2016 S/RES/2328 Request of the UN to monitor the Aleppo evacuations.

- 21 December 2016  
A/RES/71/248  
Establishment of an Investigation mechanism to investigate potential violations of international law in Syria, drafted by Lichtenstein and passed.
- 9 December 2016  
A/RES/71/130  
A resolution drafted by Canada which demanded for all attacks aimed to civilians to stop and expressed strong dissatisfaction and outrage about violence which had recently escalated. This resolution passed.

## PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

As previously mentioned, the situation in the Middle East attracts worldwide attention and has been a matter of debate for the whole international community. This issue can be divided, in terms of previous attempts to solve it, in two parts. The first part concerns measures taken by the international community in form of sanctions. The E.U. and the U.S. have been leading these efforts with strong economic sanctions against Syria, including the ban of imports from Syria, the ban of exports to Syria, the freezing of Syrian assets and of course the continuous statements against the government of Assad. Following the footsteps of the U.S. and the E.U. the Arab League as well as many other nations have publicly condemned the Assad administration and imposed sanctions such as ban of imports and exports as well as actions against Syrian state officials concerning their economic activity. These measures haven't been really effective though.

The aforementioned anti-Assad alliance has also been more actively involved. The U.S. and many other nations allied with the U.S. have taken measures against Assad by supporting the opposition of Assad. Also, the U.S. and its allies, as well as Russia and its allies have been strongly opposed to ISIS and have proceeded with airstrikes. The airstrikes have been partially effective but have also generated some strong reactions. Due to the airstrikes ISIS lost many of its fighters and a lot of ground but has turned to terrorism. Russia on the other hand has actively supported Assad and invested in the Syrian Arab Army. They have send land troops and funded the Assad administration.

The United Nations has been the most neutral party. This is due to the fact that the P5 countries are divided on this issue and have exercised their veto right whenever they could or haven't proceeded with drafting resolutions on the issue, afraid of a veto from another P5 country. The UN and especially the Security Council have made attempts to propose peace plans but the veto right of some P5 countries has stopped them as well. However, the GA has

also endorsed peace plans. To conclude, the UN has generally been strong supporter of peace and stability without any solid actions yet.

## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

This issue is an issue that requires international co-operation, co-ordination and further examination and clarification of some cases. Two much disputed events are the 2014 elections and the chemical weapons use. Such events should be examined and specific clauses concerning every dispute and event should certainly be included in a relevant resolution.

Moreover, the airstrikes should be discussed. It's up to the delegates' decision whether they would like to support the use of airstrikes and if they try this approach, they should also determine how and under which circumstances these will be carried out. Furthermore, further military action should be discussed.

Apart from this, the international community should support the anti-ISIS actions with counter-terrorism measures such as stricter border controls and funding of counter-terrorism intelligence.

Furthermore, the funding of groups and the government should be monitored with the investigation of ISIS funding being a priority. The nations which directly or indirectly support ISIS should be exposed and condemned unilaterally. Also, it should be discussed if the nations who fund either the government or the opposition should stop it aiming at the termination of the war. It must be noted that funding also includes weapons' trafficking.

Adding to that, the primary solution that the delegates should mention and endorse is dialogue and co-operation. This is why it is essential that the government and opposition together with their supporters should negotiate and try to find a solution. These peace-talks should include following points: the political aftermath in Syria (government formation and political system) and the fight against ISIS and other jihadist organizations. The aim of the peace-talks should be the establishment of a stable democratic regime and peace and stability within Syria.

Last but not least, the Security Council should address the humanitarian crisis in the Middle East and especially Syria as well as its results. Humanitarian aid is considered essential since the civil war has resulted in thousands of displaced civilians as well as a downgrade of the healthcare system and the provision of human rights.

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