



ISSUE DESCRIPTION



COMMITTEE Security Council

ISSUE Tackling the Conflict in Syria

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Introduction

The Syrian civil war routes back to 1970, when Hafez al-Assad seized control from a Baathist military junta in 1970, centralizing power in the presidency. He came from the Alawi minority, a heterodox Shia sect that had long been persecuted in Syria and was elevated to privileged positions under the post-World War I French mandate. In February 1982, Hafez al-Assad ordered the military to quell a Muslim Brotherhood uprising in the city of Hama with killing more than twenty-five thousand people there.

The power of the al-Assad regime lasted until 2011, when inspired by the Arab Spring, civilian uprising exploded and due to the violent respond of the government, turned into a civil war with international backing.

The conflict musters several parties, such as the Russian-backed government, Türkiye, the Kurdish forces, the United States, Iran and Islamist terrorist groups. Now, after a disastrous earthquake catastrophe, Syria is even more in need.

Definition of Key Terms

Ba'athist militia: also known as Ba'ath Battalions; they are a volunteer militia made up of Syrian Ba'ath Party members who are loyal to the Assad administration

Arab Spring: series of pro-democracy uprisings that began in the spring of 2011, hence the name; the protests enveloped largely Muslim countries, including Syria

Free Syrian Army (FSA): aligned decentralized resistance armies of whose coalition was formed in 2011, the army's ultimate goal is the accomplishment of the objectives of the Syrian revolutionary fights

Syrian National Coalition (SNC): National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as often called, it is Syrian opposition coalition formed in November 2012 by the

unification of multiple opposition groups [not to be confused with the Syrian National Council]

Jabhat al-Nusra: described as al-Qaeda in Syria, the jihadist terrorist organization fought against Syrian government forces in the civil war

Islamic State (IS): Salafi-Jihadist militant group also going by the names ISIS and ISIL

Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG): a Kurdish armed group which has been active since 2011, and is the primary component of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK): though its original aim was an independent Kurdish state, the PKK has shifted its focus on autonomy and increased rights for Kurds, despite, it is classified as a terrorist organization in several states and unions, such as the USA and EU

Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF): coalition of ethnic militias and rebel groups within Syria founded in 2015, its mission is to fight for a secular, democratic, and federalized Syria

Hezbollah: a Lebanese Shia Muslim political party and militant group (literal translation: "Party of God")

General Overview

In 2000, Bashar al-Assad succeeded his father. He privatized state monopolies, but the profits were concentrated among those linked to the regime, while the end of subsidies and price ceilings harmed rural peasants and urban laborers. A record-setting drought from 2006 to 2010 sharpened socioeconomic problems. Mishandled farmland was distributed fallow and farmers migrated to cities in ever-larger numbers, causing mass unemployment.

With the influence of the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt, fifteen boys in the southwestern city of Daraa, near the Syrian-Jordanian borderline, spray-painted on a school wall: 'The people want the fall of the regime.' They were arrested and tortured. Massive demonstrations followed this act of the government, and protesters were calling for something more modest than regime change: the release of political prisoners, an end to the half-century-old state of emergency, greater freedoms, and an end to corruption. Unfortunately, the outcome of these protests were negative, and Assad responded to protesters immediately, offering just token reforms while directing security services to put down the protests with force.

Anti-regime protests soon spread from Daraa to major cities such as Damascus, Hama, and Homs. The revolts were followed by the inhumane response of the government: The Syrian army fired on unarmed protesters and arrested civilians, both targeting dissidents and picking up haphazardly men and boys. What is more, cruel torture and extrajudicial executions were frequently reported. Then, in late April 2011, the Syrian army brought in tanks, besieging Daraa. Hundreds of people were killed and inhabitants were cut off from food, water, medicine, telephones, and electricity for eleven days. After the following strong international disapproval, the regime made some compromises, but it also repeated the response such as Daraa in other places where there were protests, at far greater length and cost, and consequently, some regime opponents took up arms.

In July 2011, defectors from Assad's army published the formation of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), and soon after they were shielded in Türkiye. Yet the FSA, struggled to coordinate and control its coalition, and often despoiled people who lived in the territory that was defended by them. In summer 2011, the the FSA's civilian counterpart was formed as the Syrian National Coalition (SNC), and was soon recognized by the the United States, Türkiye, and Gulf Cooperation Council countries, among others, as "the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. Its successor, the National Coalition, were unable to give meaningful diplomatic or material support to the opposition, and many of the regime's opponents within Syria accorded it little legitimacy. The people who remained from the FSA, joined Islamist brigades, and with the funding from the Gulf Islamist groups, achieved greater successes.

In January 2012, a group called Jabhat al-Nusra declared itself as al-Qaeda's Syrian institution, and the following month al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri called for Sunnis to join a jihad against the regime. In April 2013, a group from the rest of al-Qaeda in Iraq arised and surpassed even Jabhat al-Nusra in its brutality. Only in months, its forces settled supervision over territory in eastern Syria and western Iraq. The emerge of the Islamic State and other extremists groups created an increasing sectarian conflict. The government wanted to present to the world a stark choice between his secular rule and a jihadi alternative.

Both Assad's forces and rebel groups have regularly targeted civilians in areas outside of their control. More than 1,400 civilians died from chemical weapons set up by the Assad regime in the summer of 2013. This act led to the destruction of those chemical weapons that were in the possession of Assad by international forces. The regime has regularly made sieges and aerial bombardment for dual purposes: to pressure rebels to acquiesce and as prevention from offering a viable alternative.

As Assad wanted UN-aid to be distributed only among who are at government-backed areas and as Russia used its veto in order to reduce the occasions of aid-delivery from 4 to one in the

rebel-held North of Syria, the humanitarian resolution became deeply politicized. Syria has become a battlefield of world and regional powers as becoming more dependent on other countries. The regime came to rely increasingly on Iran and Russia. Iran was interested in defending the government due to its border with the Hezbollah from Lebanon, therefore, invested billions of dollars into the regime. Russia has provided Assad with critical diplomatic support, such as vetoing a UN Security Council resolution that would have punished the Syrian regime. Russia has also supported the government with military equipment, and many of their air strikes targeted civilians, although formally they were to fire terrorist groups.

The opposition's main supporter is the United States. For several years, the US covertly trained and armed rebel fighters. France and the United Kingdom have provided logistical and military support, as well. Kurds have fought to consolidate a de facto autonomous territory in northern Syria, and the defense of Kobani, a Kurdish town led by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) highlighted the militant group's effectiveness against the Islamic State. U.S. forces aided in forcing out Islamic State fighters and continued to provide arms and air support to the YPG-led Syrian Democratic Forces. Over time, the YPG started establishing autonomous Kurdish cantons in the country's north, a region the Kurds refer to as Rojava. The YPG was accused of ethnic cleansing in mixed Arab-Kurd areas. The YPG is tied to the Türkiye-based Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which Ankara and Washington have designated a terrorist organization.

In August 2016, Türkiye deployed its military along the Syrian border to both roll back Islamic State forces and to block the Kurds. The United States had faced the dilemma of choosing Türkiye or the YPG in the fight against Assad's government. Washington eventually agreed with Ankara in October 2019 to remove its troops in Syria near the Turkish border so Türkiye could launch a military offensive against the Kurds.

Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye aligned with the United States against the Assad regime, while Iran joined Russia in backing it. Important to note, that Russia and China had used their veto power multiple times on Syria-related SC resolutions, so therefore, the question of the staying of the government remained to the opponents' power against it.

Because possibility for a negotiated settlement is really low, the United States has focused on counterterrorism activities while calling for de-escalation. Meanwhile, Iran, Russia, and Türkiye have taken the diplomatic measures, not dealing with the UN-led process and excluding the United States.

The conflict has caused the largest migrant and refugee crisis since World War II, with more than ten million people having been displaced inside- and outside the borders of Syria.

In December 2016 after a prolonged siege and bombardment, the regime captured Syria's economic powerhouse, Aleppo, which was one of most important bases of the rebels.

The U.S.-led coalition, along with the Kurdish-led SDF, has rolled back the Islamic State to about 2 percent of its former territory. Unfortunately, the expulsion of the terrorist group led to massive humanitarian crisis, leaving thousands of casualties, and forcing people to leave their homes. In early 2018, Turkish forces occupied Afrin, a Kurdish field in northwestern Syria. Amid the Turkish escalation, SDF fighters were redirected from the fight against the Islamic State, redistributing in Afrin.

In October 2019, after having one thousand U.S. troops supporting the Kurdish groups removed, the civil war entered a new stage. This step cleared the way for Türkiye to commence a military operation there. In order to push Kurdish forces back, Turkish troops and their Syrian rebel allies seized towns and villages. The SDF turned to the Syrian government for help, allowing regime soldiers to reenter areas that had been previously held by the Kurds. Russian troops also invaded the region. The Turkish incursion drew international condemnation.

By December 2019, the regime and its allies progressed into Idlib, where Russia-backed forces commenced a disastrous air campaign and clashes started again between the regime and Turkish forces in order to defend their opposition posts in the area. The January ceasefire agreement between Ankara and Moscow failed as regime forces captured cities along the important M5 highway, which connects Damascus and Aleppo. In February 2020, regime forces killed Turkish troops in direct combat for the first time. Türkiye quickly reacted with a counterattack against dozens of regime targets. Meanwhile, the Islamic State raised its attacks in Northeast Syria after having killed the group's leader by the US, in October 2019. Concurrent, Israel increasingly started bombing bourns in Syria explaining that they belonged to Iran-linked militias, including Hezbollah.

Conductive to solve the huge economical and social crisis, a UN-aided constitution-drafting committee formed in 2019 concentrated 150 representatives of civil society, the regime, and the opposition, as well. But due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was quickly deadlocked.

In March 2021, Qatar, Russia, and Türkiye introduced another trail of mediations on Syria's diplomatic peace process.

In February 2023, a 7.8-magnitude earthquake shook the country's northern parts, with an estimated damage of more than 3000 casualties and more than 11000 lost homes. The aid from Iran and Russia, as well as from others such as Egypt, India, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates could easily bypass in areas controlled by the government, but in opposition-held areas many people would fall back on help, although, in the state media it was reported that rebel held areas would also receive some support. As a result of the strong winter weather and equipment shortages, rescue and relief efforts were impeded directly after the disaster, which escalated

the already grievous crisis even further. In places held by Islamist terrorist groups, international sanctions also hardened the way of redresses.

Major Parties Involved

Syria: self-explanatory

Russia: has intervened in the conflict, both directly and indirectly multiple times in addition to supplying arms and using its political tools like vetoing resolution of the United Nations Security Council

China: assumes an active role in facilitating a political resolution with the involvement of the opposing sides, has spoken up against counterterrorism measures in the region and has voiced its opinion on the situation going as far as using its veto power

Türkiye: involvement both diplomatically and militarily, personally impacted through the Kurdish issue among other factors and by the close proximity to the site of the conflict, being its neighboring state

Kurds: ethnic minority fighting for independence and a wider scope of rights in the region caught up in the escalation of the conflict

USA: heavily involved in the situation, with a military role as well as diplomatic one, advocating for counterterrorism measures, and introducing a series of sanctions in addition to other approaches

Iran: its IRGC began sending tens of thousands of militants to aid the Assad regime, further polarizing the conflict, the country has had a strategic alliance with Syria since the Iran-Iraq War

Iraq: Iraqi volunteer forces have been fighting alongside the Syrian Army in the Civil War, new diplomatic relations were established in 2006 after both countries had to face ISIL

Qatar: involvement began in 2012 with arm deliveries to rebels, however it has continued to further expand to military intervention

Saudi Arabia: has backed Islamist rebel groups such as the Army of Conquest, the country's involvement manifests in large-scale supply of weapons and ammunition, it has emerged as the main supporters of rebels through financing and arms

+ several others

Timeline of Events

1971 – Hafez al-Assad seizes power and centralizes control in the presidency

1971-2000 – the rule of Hafez al-Assad

1982 – more than twenty-five thousand people killed in the military quell of the Muslim Brotherhood uprising

2000 – Bashar al-Assad succeeds his father as the president of Syria

2000-present – Bashar al-Assad's regime

2006-2010 – record-setting drought, economic issues are compounded as a result

2011 – The Syrian Civil War begins

April 2011 – siege of Daraa, tanks brought in by The Syrian Army to counter uprisings

July 2011 – formation of the Free Syrian Army

summer 2011 – The Syrian National Council first assembles

1963-2011 – Syria's Emergency Law in force, suspending most constitutional protections

January 2012 – Jabhat al-Nusra declares itself as al-Qaeda's Syrian institution

2013 – emergence of more extremist groups, posing a further threat on the situation

April 2013 – brutality demonstrated by al-Qaeda in the regions like eastern Syria and western Iraq

August 2016 – Türkiye deploys military troops along the Syria border against Islamic State forces and the Kurds

December 2016 – the regime recaptures Syria's economic powerhouse, Aleppo

early 2018 – the city of Afrin occupied by Turkish forces

October 2019 – Washington agrees to remove troops near Syria-Türkiye border, the situation further escalates with international involvement

October 2019 – the US assassinates ISIS leader

December 2019 – the regime and allies progress into Idlib

January 2020 – ceasefire agreement between Ankara and Moscow

2019 – UN-aided constitution drafting committee forms but is quickly deadlocked

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