

# **HASMUN'19 STUDY GUIDE**

## **Disarmament and International Security**

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### **The Syrian Civil War**

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## **Letter from the Secretary-General**

Dear Delegates and Advisors,

It is a great pleasure and honor to officially invite all of you to HASMUN 2019 which will be held between **26th and 28th of April 2019** at Kadir Has University Haliç Campus in Istanbul which is located in the Golden Horn area.

I am personally thrilled to take part in the making of this conference and I am sure that the academic and organisation teams share my passion about this installment of HASMUN in which we have chosen to focus on topics that bring humanity together. And we have also included committees which will simulate historical events that can be considered existential threats which brought the international committee or some nations together. The general idea that we would like to introduce is that humanity can achieve great things in little time if we are united, or can eliminate threats that threaten our very existence.

I strongly believe that the first half of this century would be remembered in human history where we enter into a new era through technological advance. Unfortunately we haven't quite grasped the importance of this generation, as we progress we leave a print on this world and for the first time modern world is facing an existential threat, for the first time every human being on the planet is facing the threat of a considerable change in their and their ancestors living or worse, our very existence is on the line. I believe it will be events like these marked down in history which bring humanity together if we unite with no ambition of national gains and handle these crises. Our highlighted special committee of World War Z will be based on the book with the same name written by Max Brook which tells the story of how world is affected by a Zombie outbreak and the Humanitarian Advancement and Security community or HASCOM will take place in the year of 2050 where the delegates will rebuild the world from it's ashes and have the chance of changing how it works.

The other committees will be focusing on current problems that are born out of neglect for an extensive amount of time either due to lack of public interest or because of economical reasons and solving these issues will have long lasting positive effects or if they are left unsolved they may have bigger consequences in the near future.

With that I welcome and look forward to seeing all of our participants and guests on the 26th of April, at HASMUN 2019, hoping that you will have an exquisite time, debates and most importantly have fun while changing the world, only you can do it.

*Best Regards*

Ata Mavi

Secretary-General of HASMUN'19

**Letter from the Under-Secretary-General**

Dear Participants,

My Name is Abdullah Qureshi and I study Information Systems at Kadir Has University. I'd like to welcome you all to the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of HASMUN and I hope you have an experience of your life.

Like every year, this year is expected to be full of promising debates and we will be debating about The Syrian Civil War; which is in its 9<sup>th</sup> year. We will be focusing on finding a resolution and putting an end to this humanitarian crisis. The secretariat of HASMUN has provided you with rules of procedure and debate, therefore, we expect all the delegates to have done their homework as we're looking forward to a few great sessions of debating.

Lastly, I'd like to thank my assistant Mr. Berke Astarcioglu for helping me put together this study guide for you. Furthermore, I'd also like to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Ata Mavi for letting me a part of HASMUN and giving me this opportunity to look after one of my favorite committees in a MUN.

In case you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me an:

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Abdullah Qureshi  
Under-Secretary-General DISEC

## I. Introduction to the Committee

The General Assembly (GA) was established under Chapter IV of the United Nations (UN) Charter. **Since the General Assembly is the main organ of the United Nations and has representation from every UN member states**, it is able to discuss a wide variety of world issues. As a result of the extensive spectrum of topics discussed by the UN, the General Assembly is made up of six different committees. These committees are the Disarmament and International Security (DISEC) committee, the Economics and Financial (ECOFIN) committee, the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural (SOCHUM) committee, the Special Political and Decolonization (SPECPOL) committee, the Administrative and Budgetary Committee, and the Legal Committee. DISEC, the First Committee of the General Assembly, is one of the most popular GA-style committees in Model United Nations.

It considers all disarmament and international security matters within the scope of the Charter or relating to the powers and functions of any other organ of the United Nations; the general principles of cooperation in the maintenance of international peace and security, as well as principles governing disarmament and the regulation of armaments; promotion of cooperative arrangements and measures aimed at strengthening stability through lower levels of armaments.

In light of the events in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the first resolution by DISEC was created in 1946 to address international concerns for the “Establishment of a Commission to Deal with the Problems Raised by the Discovery of Atomic Energy.”

The Committee works in close cooperation with the United Nations Disarmament Commission and the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament. It is the only Main Committee of the General Assembly entitled to verbatim records coverage. DISEC deals with topics that center around disarmament, global issues, and threats to peace that jeopardize international security. Under Article 11 of Chapter IV of the UN Charter, “The General Assembly may consider the general principles of co-operation in the maintenance of international peace and security, including the principles governing disarmament and the regulation of armament.”

## II. Introduction to the Agenda Item

### a. Outline:

Whether it be Palestine-Israel issue, Syrian civil war or gulf war all these have contributed to the instability in the region. The extremist groups like ISIS, Al-Qaeda are deeply rooted in the region while the international actors have failed to drive out such groups from this region. The Middle East is not only falling apart but is shaping into a hub of religious wars. This region has always been exploited by the great powers for either personal benefits or for political gains. This exploitation has led to chaos in the region for decades. The power struggle between the states has resulted in colossal violence that no has been accountable for.

Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war it has been inflamed by religious sectarianism. The violent non-state actors have caused immense destruction on the name of religion augmented by the Syrian government. Uprisings against the Assad regime, a crackdown on the anti-government protests and brutal violence has only resulted in the loss of thousands of civilians including children. The crossfire between the citizens and government has been exploited by the extremist groups. They have used child soldiers, kidnapped and tortured people in order to support their religious claims.

#### **Human rights violation is the most apparent feature of the Syrian conflict.**

Violence in Syria has escalated since the intervention of the US and Russia forces. The Russian and Syrian forces claim to be targeting the armed groups which have resulted in collateral damage, resulting in the loss of innocent lives. One of the many horrors in this civil war is the use of chemical weapons such as barrel bombs and scud missiles that have contributed to the countless crimes against humanity. These attacks have killed, destroyed and displaced Syrians amounting to the large scale war crimes committed during the conflict. The sad part is that the Syrian government itself is responsible for inhumane acts carried out like murder, rape, detentions, torture etc. Amnesty International released a press statement saying that opposition groups have been deliberately and unlawfully killing captured opponents in Syria, and called on all opposition parties to abide by international humanitarian law. The Syrian government and the international community have failed in their responsibility to protect the Syrian people.

Amidst all this the Security Council resolutions have been breached, Law of war has been despoiled, international humanitarian law has been violated for sufficient number of times but unfortunately, no strict action has been taken so far. Propositions have been made, inspections have been carried out, reports have been gathered but no concrete steps have been taken so far to punish the actors responsible for this horrible warfare. Despite substantial evidence of human rights abuse the UN and other organizations have failed miserably in holding the Syrian government accountable for humanitarian catastrophes. The conflict has escalated to regions such as Europe transforming it into a refugee crisis.

## **b. General Background**

After more than two years of diplomatic manoeuvring, the number of, associations between, and political stances of various Syrian entities claiming a say in the outcome of the Syrian crisis have been in constant flux. Though media attention has presented the situation as a two-party conflict between the government of President Bashar Al-Assad and the National Coalition of Syrian Forces of the Revolution and Opposition (Syrian National Coalition, SNC), many others exist. The participation of these parties in multi-party negotiations may be critical in guaranteeing successful negotiations. Additionally, the stated preconditions of various Syrian factions and the perceived political-military environment of the war have not produced circumstances appealing enough for negotiations to take place thus far.

The Syrian civil war has generated fears of spillover violence and creating a wider regional conflict since its inception. The region's tapestry of religious and ethnic groups transcends existing national borders. This concern has been exacerbated by the country's long and very porous borders with Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. Each of these countries have seen limited armed conflict, provide relatively unrestricted access for arms trafficking, and are unable to limit the movement of both combatants and refugees.

The conflict has divided into two overarching sides, that of the Assad government backed by the Syrian military, and "the opposition," a conglomeration of various anti-government groups from a wide range of political, religious and social backgrounds. Syrian government forces receive support from Iran and Hezbollah in apparent solidarity with the Alawi-dominated Assad government – Alawites follow the Twelver school of Shi'a Islam. Russia also supports Assad in an attempt to maintain a geopolitical foothold in the region. The various rebels, largely Sunni groups, receive support from regional Sunni regimes such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey as well as increasing amounts of aid funnelled from Western Europe and the United States.

## **c. Factors behind the War**

Syrian Civil War, which is a multi-sided conflict, has been fought between Bashar al-Assad, his loyal military and various domestic and international allies versus several separatist factions and their international supporters since 2011. In order to understand how the war started and how it led to today's atmosphere, several factors including the socio-economic and religious conjuncture of Syria, dominating ideologies, international alliances, regional dynamics of the Middle-East and the history of the Assad's government should be looked at.

Syria was first a French mandate, separated from the collapsed Ottoman Empire, then become independent in 1946 following World War 2, as France left Syria. In 1958, United Arab Republic was founded as a political union between Egypt and Syria, from which Syria seceded, following a coup d'état by the Syrian military, which was concerned about the increasing power of Egypt on Syria. After the coup and dissolution of the United Arab Republic, a new Syrian government, composed of the old National Party and People's Party members was founded, while communists

became the first political group to be purged. This secessionist government ruled the Syrian Republic until 1963.

In 1963, Syria witnessed another coup, this time carried by the regional branch of the Arab Socialist Ba'athist party, which was founded in 1947, and allied with other Ba'athists such as the Iraqi branch, which also successfully overthrew the Iraqi government, only two months earlier. Some of the key people behind the coup were Ziad al-Hariri, Salah Jadid and finally Hafez al-Assad, who later fought for the power against Jadid and other traditional leaders of Syrian Ba'ath, and after two coups (first in 1966, and then in 1971) attempts became the ruler of Syria in 1970. The current president of Syria, Bashar al-Assad, is a son of Hafez, and he took the power after his father's death in 2000. The Six Days War (1967) which was fought against Israel, was a reason that increased the tension between Salah Jadid and Hafez al-Assad

Syria, since it was founded as a sovereign state, includes different ethnic and religious groups in its territory, and the tension between this demographic groups has been the cause of several disputes and conflicts, including the very agenda of this committee: Syrian Civil War. In terms of ethnicities, majority of Syria (around 80%) consists of Syrian Arabs, and the largest minority is the Kurdish people, who make up the 10%, which is followed by Turkmens (around 5%). Religious and sect-based differences are also present, while 85% of Syrians are Muslim and the rest are mostly Christians, Muslims are subdivided to various sects. Majority of Syrian Muslims are Sunni, while Shias and Alawites are a minority of 15%, and especially given that the family in the leadership of Syria is Alawite (while considering themselves as secular), this difference between Alawite leadership and Sunni majority, of which a significant portion is Islamic-extremist, has been one of the fundamental reasons behind the tension. Kurds, Turkmens and other ethnicities are also divided between sects.

In the following sub-chapters, key groups and events behind the tension in Syria, how this tension turned into a civil war, and the emergence of ISIS, which fundamentally changes the atmosphere is further explained.

### **Ba'ath Party:**

Ba'ath was founded as a political party in Syria in 1947 with the ideology of "Ba'athism" which in means renaissance or resurrection in Arabic. Founders of Ba'ath were Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Din al-Bitar, in addition to a significant role taken by Zaki al-Arsuzi. Aflaq was a Christian, al-Bitar was Sunni Muslim and al-Arsuzi was from Alawi roots, while all the co-founders shared secularism, Arab nationalism and socialism as their ideology, which shaped the future of Ba'ath party, which has governed Iraq and still ruling Syria. Ba'ath's motto was "Unity, Liberty, Socialism", and they aimed to combine Arab nationalist, pan-Arabism, Arab socialist, and anti-imperialist interests together, to unify the entire Arab World in a single sovereign state. An important goal of Ba'ath was to free Arab people from the external interferences and control of non-Arab states, including freeing the economic resources of in Arab countries from Western companies, most notably the oil reserves.

After the foundation and the rising to the power, Ba'ath Party was divided between its civilian faction, led by the original founders, and the military committee, which was again divided between Jadid and Hafez al-Assad. The struggle for power caused the

1966 Syrian coup d'état and split the party into Iraqi-dominated Ba'ath movement and the Syrian-dominated Ba'ath movement.

Being principally anti-West and socialist, Ba'ath party and many of its key leaders (including Hafez al-Assad) sided with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, in exchange for protection from other countries and sales of weapons, as well as financial aid.

### **Rising to Power: Al- Assad Family**

Originally from Qardaha, located in north-west Syria, the al-Assad family is an Alawite minority tribe, and its roots go back to the time Syrians first became a French mandate. Being a significant family in the Alawite community of Syria and having necessary connections and economic ties in a country where tribal and feudal connections are still valid, helped the members of the al-Assad family to become key people in Syria. Hafez al-Assad, who was born in 1930 and joined in the Ba'ath party in 1946, quickly rose to higher ranks in the party, despite harsh opposition from the Muslim Brotherhood, which was supported by many wealthy families of Syria. Assad became the president of the Union of Syrian Students, organizing events, protests and gatherings for the Ba'athists, and during his political activism in school, he met many important figures of the future Syria.

Assad continued his education in Syrian Armed Forces military academy, for financial reasons. Assad became an air force lieutenant in 1955. In 1958, after the foundation of the United Arab Republic, the military committee of Ba'ath party resurrected the regional branch of the party. In 1962, this group of Ba'athists attempted a coup but failed, Assad, who had a minor role in the plan, was jailed in Lebanon. Shortly afterwards, he rose in ranks and became the commander of the Syrian Air Force. After the coup of 1966, in which Jadid became the sole leader of Syria, Assad was appointed the Minister of Defense.

The Six-Day War of 1967 changed the Ba'athists in Syria fundamentally, causing many, including Assad to blame Jadid for the defeat. After the war, policies of Jadid and Assad started to differ. While Jadid's main focus was creating a guerilla force and implementing socialism in Syria, Assad wanted to focus on creating well diplomatic relations with other Arab countries against Israel, and he also wanted to democratize the party. These differences between Jadid and Assad caused a duality of power in Syria, which resolved with the 1970 coup d'état, in favor of Assad.

After the coup, Hafez al-Assad ruled Syria until his death. His policies included institutionalizing his government, creating a cult of personality for himself, weakening the power of the rest of the party. During his regime, a teacher had begun lessons at schools by saying "our eternal leader Hafez al-Assad", and portraits depicting him with the prophet of Islam, Muhammad could be seen in Syria. Assad chose himself a nickname, similar to "Führer" of Germany, "al-Muqaddas", which means "the sanctified one", and people of Syria had to call him by this name.

Another change in Syria under Assad's rule was the increasing power of Alawite figures in the military and the government. Both for supporting his own sect, and out of fear from conservative Sunnis, Assad replaced key figures in the government with Alawites supporting him. The increasing difference between the majority of the people who are Sunni and the Alawite minority seizing the power caused tension in Syria, which started

an Islamist uprising against Assad. Starting from the late 1970s, Sunni supremacists started to organize attacks against Alawite Ba'athists. One of the turning points in the conflict was the Hama massacre of 1982, where thousands of people were killed by the Syrian forces, as a response to the Islamist uprising. In 2000, Hafez al-Assad died, and his son Bashar came to the power as his successor, even though the constitution of Syria should have prevented Bashar becoming a president before the age 40 (as he was only 34), the constitution was amended right after Hafez's death.

In the beginning, Bashar al-Assad followed milder policies compared to his father. He granted amnesty to many political prisoners including members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Furthermore, he tried to develop better relationships with the West, at least during the beginning stage of the War on Terror, despite the fact that he has been criticizing the US and its allies in the region such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Israel.

### **Main Topic: Arab Spring**

In late 2010, several protests, some of which turning armed uprisings, had started in the Middle-East and spread nearly fully to the region. It all started in Tunisia with protests by the lower segments of the people against the anti-democratic regime and the low standard of living. Protests spread fast, especially thanks to technology and social media. Twitter became the platform where protesters made the plans for gatherings and inform the rest of the world regarding their manifest and what was going on in their countries. Strongest protests were seen in Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain during the Arab Spring.

Arab Spring lasted for several years in some countries and turned into civil war in two occasions, Libya, where the civil war caused the Qaddafi government being overthrown, and Qaddafi himself getting killed by the protesting mob, and this committees scope: Syria.

Protestors from several different sections in Syria were gathered against Assad government in January 2011, which turned into a military conflict between pro-Assad military forces and the protesters in the summer of the same year. Protests first turned into major unrest in March, but it turned into an armed insurgency when the Syrian Army responded the protesters with deadly military attacks in April. In the beginning, the main goal of the protesters in Syria was to grant the release of the political prisoners.

### **Increasing Tension: Protests Turning into Civil War**

On 29 July 2011, opposition forces in Syria founded the Free Syrian Army (FSA), with the help of military defectors from Assad's forces. This rebel army's sole goal was to remove Bashar al-Assad from the power. In nearly all cities of Syria, armed conflicts started between rebels, this time organized under leadership, and the loyalists. Despite early international attempts to negotiate for peace, such as Kofi Annan's plan, both sides continued fighting. The first ceasefire period was achieved in on 12th April 2012, but it was a failure, and the war got even more escalated shortly afterwards. Houla, Haffa, Aleppo and the capital city Damascus became places where heavy fighting between the opposing sides was seen and many casualties including civilians happened. Syrian Civil War, from the beginning, has been a place of many atrocities and human rights violations, including massacres.

After the escalation into a full-scale civil war, the main military struggles were for the control of Aleppo, the second largest city of Syria, and several rebel attacks against loyalist-dominated capital, Damascus. As the war continued, many international actors, such as the US, the Human Rights Watch, and the UN, who were observing what was going on, started to state their concerns regarding the civilian casualties of the fighting. In many occasions, pro-Assad forces were attacking directly against civilian targets with missiles and fighter aircraft. This escalation is usually named as the “third phase of the civil war”.

In late 2013 and early 2014, on one hand, the Kurdish separatist forces, who aim to sustain control on the Kurdish-dominated Rojava region in northern Syria, and their military organization, YPG, started to increase their activities, while on the other hand, many Islamist factions, some allied with the Free Syrian Army, in the beginning, got stronger, both in numbers and also the resources they have. This rise of the Islamists in Syrian Civil War, and the whole concept of ISIS, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (also called ISIL, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or in short, IS, the Islamic State), caused international responses. Firstly in 2015, the US intervention to Syria had started, in a smaller scale at least at the beginning. This was followed by Russian intervention, which means a fundamentally different change, as Russia was, and still is, backing Bashar al-Assad government in Syria, while the West has been mostly against him. Further developments in the area included Israel starting air attacks, Kurdish separatists declaring autonomy in the regions where they are the majority, and Turkey’s intervention.

### **Power Vacuum Filled: Emergence of ISIS**

As it has become one of the major concerns in the Syrian Civil War for the world, how the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria had emerged and what their goal was should be analyzed in depth. ISIS was first emerged under the rule of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, as an extremist organization following the fundamentalist Salafi doctrine of Sunni Islam. It was first founded in 2006 in Iraq and spread to other Middle-Eastern countries, especially Syria. The founders of ISIS were ex-Jihadists, who were aligned with al-Qaeda, and participated in the insurgency against the US forces in Iraq, after the invasion in 2003. The situation of Iraq after 2003 and the lack of a strong government has been accepted as the reason behind the foundation and spread of the extremist and terrorist organizations such as ISIS by many. A very similar problem then happened in Syria, where the power vacuum caused by the central Assad government losing its power and control as a result of the civil war, becoming the key factor behind the emergence of ISIS as a key actor in the civil war, achieving the control of the several regions of Syria, until the international co-operation including the US, Russia, Turkey, pro-Assad forces, and the Kurdish YPG (which are not exactly on the same side but all had the common enemy: ISIS) finally managed to decrease its influence.

The emergence of ISIS in the world stage and becoming a proto-state started in 2014 when ISIS proclaimed itself a worldwide caliphate, the leading country of Islam and the ruler of all the Muslims around the world. Even though most of the mainstream Muslim groups rejected its statehood and did not pledge alliance to the so-called Islamic State, many Muslim extremists and radicalized people from all around the world gathered to

Syria to join ISIS as a militant. Some of them even brought their families with them, so that they could live on the territory controlled by ISIS, the Islamic State.

At the end of 2015, the total population living on the area controlled by ISIS in Syria was estimated to be between 8 and 12 million. ISIS ruled this territory until it lost it and enforced Islamic Sharia law. What differs ISIS from the rest of the Islamist terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda is that ISIS claims to be a state, with law and population. It uses social media and propaganda for radicalizing Muslims around the world and convincing them to join ISIS and fight for Allah. Many terror attacks in Europe and North America has been carried out by people who were radicalized by ISIS's propaganda material online, despite they do not have any connection with the organization. Financials of ISIS, especially the funds it receives from outside has always been a critical issue.

#### **d. History of the Topic in the Arab World**

With only a few exceptions, both rebel factions and the Assad government have precluded the possibility of direct negotiations by demanding that substantial preconditions be met by their opponents. Most of these preconditions have required unilateral action by the opposing side that would be detrimental to their perceived strength, and thus are non-starters. The United Nations (UN) and the League of Arab States (LAS) have attempted to remedy this stalemate by providing a nonpartisan interlocutor, the Joint Arab League-United Nations Envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, and his predecessor Kofi Annan.

UN and LAS efforts have focused on drafting a mutually appealing proposal to be submitted by the Joint Envoy to concerned parties. Attempts thus far have failed in large part because of the rigidity of concerned parties' preconditions and the convictions of each that their side will ultimately prevail on the battlefield.

The Syrian Government claims that its adversaries are all terrorist elements, and thus refuses to negotiate with the opposition based on this premise (Black), preferring instead to pursue the complete 'cleansing' of Syria from the "terrorist" insurgents ("Aleppo Shelled as Assad Vows to 'cleanse' Syria"). In contrast, the rebels insist upon the complete removal from power of President Assad – and, recently, the Shi'a community in its entirety – rather than compromise and reconciliation with his government (Mourtada).

As stated, the conflict has been marked by a sectarian divide, with the Alawis, Christians, Druze and other Shi'a minority groups supporting the Assad government and Sunnis making up the majority of opposition forces (Riedel). The entrance of Hezbollah into the conflict in June of 2013, assisting the Assad regime's conquest of the town of Qusayr, marked the first official and active kinetic involvement of an outside force in the conflict and further stoked sectarian divides both within Syria and within neighboring states ("Hezbollah Urged to Pull out of Syria").

Russia and Iran are the primary financial and military backers of the Assad government, where Russia is fulfilling pre-existing contracts to furnish advanced military systems and Iran is providing material support to Hezbollah as well as training and equipping pro-regime militias (Charbonneau).

The major international supporters of the opposition groups have been Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, which are providing arms, munitions, and monetary support to the various groups with which they maintain relations (“Qatar Bankrolls Syrian Revolt with Cash and Arms”). The United States is poised to increase its support of opposition groups through the shipment of arms and military aid after the alleged use of chemical weapons by the regime against the opposition in March of 2013.

### **III. Timeline of Events**

Syria’s war has been the most complex conflict to emerge from the 2011 Arab uprisings. Twice, in the spring of 2013 and in mid-2015, the Assad regime almost collapsed. Its comeback is attributable largely to outside players. The war has evolved through five phases that, along the way, have embroiled foreign figures and militias (often on different sides) from dozens of countries, regional governments, and global powers. Following we will look at the series of events that followed up until recent times where the war has cooled down but far from over.

The first phase was ignited by protests in early 2011. Inspired by the Arab Spring uprisings across the Middle East, Syrian adolescents in southern Daraa scrawled anti-regime graffiti on public walls. They were arrested, held for days and tortured, in turn prompting local demonstrations that called for their release. Peaceful protests rapidly spread across Syria as the focus shifted to the regime of President Bashar Assad. As the marches gained momentum, the regime unleashed its military firepower which became the very first stone in the building of this civil war.

The second phase witnessed the onset of an armed insurgency and Syria’s descent into full-scale civil war. By 2012, an array of poorly organized opposition groups had formed rebel brigades, many armed by foreign patrons, that seized key cities in the north, including parts of Aleppo, Syria’s largest city.

As the government lost territory in 2013, Lebanon’s Hezbollah openly deployed its fighters and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) dispatched military advisors to prop up the Assad government.

The third phase was marked by the rise of ISIS and other hardline Islamist groups that tapped local sympathizers as well as foreign fighters.

In 2014, the creation of the Islamic State caliphate; which claimed roughly a third of Syrian territory, with Raqqa as its capital, generated a different set of flashpoints and frontlines. It was, basically, a different war. It also prompted direct U.S. military intervention. Meanwhile, moderate rebel groups fighting the government were increasingly eclipsed by extremist factions.

The fourth phase, in 2015 and 2016, featured growing Russian military intervention, especially air power, against moderate rebel factions. Russia deployed some of its most sophisticated weaponry and air defence systems. The roles of Hezbollah and Iran deepened too.

During the fifth phase, the Assad regime retook territory and consolidated its control over most of the country.

By the end of 2016, it had retaken major cities, including Aleppo, as well as areas across Syria’s strategic western spine.

In 2017, it knit together patches of the countryside to cement the restoration of government power.

By mid-2018, it also recaptured strategic suburbs surrounding Damascus for the first time in five years. It then turned its sights further south to Daraa, the birthplace of the uprising. It seized the city as well as most of southwest Syria by the summer of 2018. Each of these phases featured failed efforts at diplomacy, initially led by the United Nations and backed by the United States. But the negotiations, in Geneva, repeatedly deadlocked. In 2017, Russia launched a separate initiative, with Iran and Turkey as partners, that included negotiations in Astana, the Kazakh capital, and Sochi in Russia. Erupting in the heart of the Levant, Syria's war had a rippling impact throughout the Middle East; it also reverberated deep into Europe. It sparked the largest humanitarian crisis since the end of World War II (only surpassed in 2018 by Yemen's war). Millions of refugees poured into Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and even Iraq and Egypt as well as several European countries, where the refugee crisis redefined the political landscape. At home, more than half of Syria's population was displaced and dependent on humanitarian aid for daily subsistence. Destruction—of homes, schools, businesses, hospitals, roads and infrastructure, was estimated in the hundreds of billions of dollars.

#### **IV. International Actors in the Syrian War**

##### **● Russian Federation**

The economic, political and military alliance between Russia and the Syrian government dates back to 1956, as the Cold War emerged and both USA and Russia were looking for allies in the Middle East, the Syrian Government favored the Soviet Union over the United States of America. The relations only strengthened with the Ba'athist Government and today Russia still supplies Assad's government with arms and weapons to fight the civil war. However, Russia's involvement in the civil war hasn't been directly from the start but today the nation does active aerial missions on rebel assets and has troops on the ground. Even though there are reports from some nations that Russia has been actively involved in the Civil War as early as 2012, the Russian Government hasn't recognised this and hasn't been directly involved in the conflict until 30 September 2015, up until that point Russia only supplied the Syrian government with new armored vehicles, surveillance equipment, radars, electronic warfare systems, spare parts for helicopters, and various weapons including guided bombs for planes. The initial involvement of the Russian Federation in the war consisted of aerial missions against ISIL the Al-Nusra Front and Ahrar-ash-Sham which were perceived as enemies of Syrian Government. However various Russian public service agencies and the Russian Orthodox Church advertised the military intervention as a holy war against terrorism even though the attacks also targeted rebel positions. Without doubt if Russia was not involved in the war directly in 2015 the Assad government would have more difficulties stabilising, even facing a collapse with the number of other foreign involvement considered however after the military intervention the Syrian Government has stabilised and regained a lot of lost land. Russia has a lot of influence on the Assad Government and a resolution ending the

civil war must have it's approve or it will most likely not be entertained by the government.

- **Iran**

Iran is another key ally to the Syrian Government and also a part of the coalition that supports Assad. The Islamic Republic of Iran has been an important strategic ally of the Syrian Government even before the start of the Civil War due to it's geopolitical security concerns and the toppling of the Assad Government would mean those concerns are compromised. At the starting of the war, Iran hasn't recognised it's involvement in the civil war, denying any claims that reported of Iranian Revolutionary Guard's deployment on Syrian soil or the technical aid however it would acknowledge the death of some personnel that were targeted by Israeli strikes on Syrian soil. It is worth to note that due to hostilities between Israel and Iran, Israel has violated the airspace of Syria on many occasions to target Iranian assets and militant organisations tied to the Islamic Republic.

- **Iraq**

The Iraqi Government has been a close ally of Syria alongside Iran however their aid to the Syrian Civil War has mostly been political and against ISIL. They have opened the airspace for Iran which allowed them to ferry resources using airplanes and also granted passage for trucks headed to Syria, apart from that their help has been very limited considering the Iraqi government was struck hard by ISIS. However, during the downfall of ISIS, Iraq has struck ISIS targets in Deir-ez Zor and supplies Syria with fuel. In 2018 the Syrian Government also allowed Iraqi army to strike ISIS targets across the border.

- **United States of America**

The US Government hasn't always been on best terms with Assad's Syria, the resentment dating back to Cold War when Syria chose to align itself with the Soviet Union, this alliance has built trust between the two nations and naturally the United States felt threatened by this. However after the collapse of the Soviet Union the relations between two countries were relatively neutral yet far from good. Syria had good relations with Iran and was on a technical level still at war with Israel over the Golan Heights dispute. The relations between Assad regime and US took a rapid downhill advancement as the civil war broke out however. US was not willing to condemn and ask for a regime change as soon as the hostilities between the government and opposition began. Only small sanctions that didn't have big impacts were imposed at first and with President Barack Obama asking for the hostilities to cease. However in the same year on August 2011 Secretary of State Hillary Clinton claimed that Bashar al-Assad lost his legitimacy called for his ousting. This action started a chain of events that would lead to the involvement of US in the civil war. At first sanctions barring US citizens to conduct business with Syrian government were imposed and oil sales were halted as well. Other sanctions were soon followed in the same year and this resulted in arguments in UN with the Syrian ambassador calling out the sanctions as an act of diplomatic war. It is also revealed that the CIA started running a covert program to arm and train the Syrian rebels, showing that US is in

favor of a regime change. During this time and in 2012 the US government approved non-lethal aid to Syrian rebels with funds up to \$250 million. In 2013 with the Ghouta chemical attack the US considered directly striking Syrian soil and also imposing a no-fly zone on the Southern border with the cooperation of Jordan to train the Syrian rebels. The decision to strike Syria was rejected by President Barack Obama. The US kept firmly supporting the rebel groups up until 2015, with various sources claiming that the rebels were supplied with heavy armaments from the US including anti-tank missiles, even though the weapons were of American origin it was not clear if the US has supplied those arms or if the rebels have acquired them from another party with access to US arsenal.

At this time the support for the rebels in the US was waning because of their operational weakness and some of the various groups close ties to the ISIL due to this the US support shifted from the rebels to the Kurdish militias in Northern Syria that were fighting ISIL which was perceived as a major threat globally. The US led coalition also assisted the Kurdish militias in defense of the town Kobane with airstrikes, helping the militias known as PYD to fight the Islamic State and later deploying troops on ground and other various equipment as progress was made. In the same year the Russian Federation started the military intervention in Syria which the US responded with a re-supply of various rebel groups but majorly the Kurdish militias. The US also abandoned a training program worth \$500 million for the rebels, now majorly supporting the Kurdish militias. The US occupation in Syria continues to this day under the motive of fighting ISIS and aiding the Kurds. In 2017 under the presidency of Donald J. Trump the United States launched a strike against Syrian airfields after suspecting that Assad was behind another chemical attack, this is the only time the United States directly attacked the Syrian Government and even though hostilities were at a tipping point the crisis de-escalated with negotiations. In the last quarter of 2018 Donald J Trump announced that the US troops would be coming back home from Syria since the ISIS threat was mainly dealt with, reducing the military personnel down to 400 in an attempt to keep up the fight against ISIS and deter a Turkish military intervention in North East Syria. Without doubt US is one of the major parties here needed to achieve long term peace as they support a group that is in control of one third of the country, however due to geopolitical security concerns the US is not inclined to Assad staying in power and regaining North East Syria.

- **United Kingdom**

The United Kingdom has been on board with ousting Bashar al-Assad with United States ever since the hostilities began in 2011 however their aid has been mostly non-lethal, providing medical supplies and communication devices to the rebels and non-combatants. It wasn't until 2013 that Britain considered getting directly involved in the war when a vote was held to determine whether or not the UK would join US in a military intervention in Syria however the vote decided that Britain would not be involved and President Cameron respected the parliament's decision. In 2015 a French-British sponsored resolution was passed in the Security Council urging all member states to take necessary actions against the Islamic State, which David Cameron used to influence the British parliament to approve airstrikes against ISIS targets on Syrian soil alongside the coalition forces. There is also evidence that British

special forces have been deployed alongside Kurdish militias and various rebel groups however the British involvement in the conflict would be minimal and mainly against the Islamic State.

- **France**

France follows a similar scenario as the UK, standing along it's allies with the coalition and asking for the removal of Bashar al-Assad providing political assistance in the international area and non-lethal aid to the rebels. However the French government was ready for a military intervention in Syria in 2013 alongside the US and UK but due to the decision of not taking action by Barack Obama, France was isolated and the decision was scratched. However in 2014 France started supplying arms to various rebel groups in Syria, this information was confirmed by then president François Hollande. In 2015 September France had already started conducting airstrikes on ISIS targets however after the Paris terror attacks in mid-november the airstrikes were intensified, citing self-defence under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. In the wake of the attacks France also drafted the Security Council resolution that Britain would co-sponsor, urging all member states to take necessary action against Islamic State which Britain would use as motive for their military intervention. In 2018 when the US announced that they would be reducing their military personnel in Syria the Kurdish factions in North East Syria negotiated with France in an attempt to persuade them to stay in Syria, even though President Emmanuel Macron vowed to protect the Kurds from aggression of their neighbours it still remains to be seen if France has the capabilities or the motives to do this without US support.

- **Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia much like Iran felt obliged to be involved in the Syrian Civil War due to it's security concerns, it has showed sympathy and support for the rebels from the starting of the war and actively supplied the rebels with arms as early as 2012 the relations with Syria is at an all time low since the starting of the war as Saudi Arabia became the largest financier and supplier of the Syrian Rebels. Between 2015 and 2016 minimal cooperation with Turkey was established between Turkey and Saudi Arabia in arming and training the rebels with Turkey being used as a base for the arms shipments and Saudi Arabia promising to take part in the military intervention against ISIS with Turkey's cooperation however no significant further action was taken. Since then Saudi Arabia's support for the rebel groups have started to wane as the US decided to support the Kurdish militias instead of the rebel groups.

- **Qatar**

Qatar has openly supported the Syrian Rebels alongside the other Arab League nations and is reported to have sent the most weapons to Syria with over 70 cargo flights. The weapons would be delivered to Syria through Turkey showing cooperation between two countries in supporting the rebels. And Qatar also takes part in training the rebels on it's own soil with CIA backing.

- **Jordan**

Jordan was directly involved in the fight against Islamic State when the jihadists threatened to invade Jordan after their planned invasion of Baghdad. There were numerous attacks on the Jordanian border and Jordan was involved in US-led bombing of ISIL targets. A Jordanian jet was downed by the Islamic State on 2014 and a series of events led to the execution of the pilot which Jordan retaliated with the intense bombing of ISIL targets leading many aerial missions against them.

- **Turkey**

The government of Turkey had fairly good relations with Syria prior to the Civil War, with both nations cooperating economically and politically in the early 2000's and the relations were looking good however due to Turkey's security concerns and the Syrian Government not taking sound action against these concerns both sides were on the fence. When the civil war broke out Turkey joined the calls for Bashar al-Assad's resign the relations were then worsened when Turkey harbored Syrian defectors, trained and armed them, also providing various military equipment as well. In 2012 after a Turkish jet was downed the relations were at an all-time low as both countries were on the brink of war, with border clashes happening. These events lead to Turkey becoming a major supporter of the Syrian opposition alongside the US, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Turkey also hosted the head of the Free Syrian Army and provided a safe base of operations for the rebels on Turkish soil. In 2014 Turkey did not take part in the bombing missions alongside US as it was asking for US to focus it's aerial power on removing Bashar al-Assad from power just as much as using it on ISIL targets and didn't permit the use of Incirlik Base until 2015 and during this time there was a huge number of Syrian refugees flowing into Turkey, estimated around 2 million people. Turkey planned on creating a safe zone between the town of Kobane and Azzaz to house these people, the deal was agreed by both sides but the US backed out on it due to concerns that Turkey was trying to bring NATO into a war and removed the Patriot missile batteries in Southern Turkey which lead to a crisis between two nations. In the same year an internal crisis broke out in Turkey, the terrorist organisation known as PKK resumed it's fight against the government and due to security concerns Turkey opted not to take part in the fighting against ISIL for the time being. 2016 had been a rough year for Turkey internally but by the last quarter of that year the government stabilised and launched an operation into Syria known as Euphrates Shield which aimed to capture an ISIS pocket that bordered Turkey, the operation was successful after 7 months and Turkish troops were now on Syrian soil, occupying a portion of the land under the motive of self-defence but also separating Manbij and the Afrin Canton of the Kurds. After the Euphrates Shield Operation Turkey started stabilising the region under it's control and returning a portion of the refugees which it hosted and in 2018 launched another operation known as Operation Olive Branch, this operation was condemned by many parties in the conflict but also found just by some, as Turkey was acting on the motive of self-defence against Syrian Kurds which are allegedly tied to the terrorist insurgency in Turkey, the PKK. The operation is still ongoing as Kurdish militias are conducting guerilla warfare in the region but it is mostly successful. Turkey is a major supporter of the Syrian opposition and is in a de-facto

coalition with Russia and Iran, negotiating with both parties to find a resolution for the war, even though relations between Turkey and the US has worsened because of the US's decision to back the Syrian Democratic Forces Turkey is still allied with them through NATO. It appears that if a resolution is to be reached that includes the Rebels, Turkey will play a huge role in influencing the rebels to compromise and find a peaceful solution.

- **Israel**

Even though Syria and Israel are officially at an active war since 1948 hostilities have been extremely limited in the last few decades up until 2017. There are various reports from the militaries of member states that Israel has been striking Iranian linked targets and Hezbollah targets close to Golan Heights however this information has not been acknowledged by the Israeli government until 2017. Military officials in Israeli air force confirmed that they have done over 100 missions in Syria during the course of the war, targeting Syrian Government arms convoys and Hezbollah positions. To this day Israel continues to violate Syrian airspace and carry out aerial bombing missions.

- **Lebanon**

The influence of Lebanon on the Syrian Civil war has been mostly limited however it has been greatly affected by the war. Being on the border of it Lebanon took refugees escaping the war and provided humanitarian aid since the starting of the war. Hezbollah which is based in Lebanon took part in the Civil War as early as 2012 on Bashar al-Assad's side and has been an important element during it.

## **V. Major Factions in Syria**

### **The Syrian Government "The Regime"**

Bashar Assad took office after the death of his father Hafiz in 2000. The Assads are members of the Alawite minority and their Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party is a remnant of the 1960s era of Arab nationalism. Their regime receives support from minorities and other Syrians because the alternative appears to be chaos and extremism. The regime's main ally is Russia, as it has been for decades. It is also allied to Iran, which has sent mercenaries to support it. Due to its alliance with Iran it is also supported by Hezbollah in Lebanon. As such the regime is part of the Iranian and "Shia" crescent or "corridor" to the sea. The regime has committed widespread human rights abuses, using barrel bombs and driving millions of Syrians to become refugees.

### **Pro-Regime Militias:**

The regime is supported by a variety of militias of the National Defense Forces and Local Defense Forces. These include numerous units, some close to Iran and Hezbollah. There are also Iranian-backed mercenaries such as the Fatemiyoun Afghan Shia units. These have been used to fill the gaps as the Syrian Arab Army, the official government forces, have weakened from attrition losses. Sometimes they are referred

to as “cannon fodder.” Most recently some of the Liwa al-Baqir, one of these units, entered Afrin to aid the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) in the fight against Turkey and Syrian rebels.

### **Hezbollah, Russian contractors and the IRGC:**

Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has put down roots in Syria. Along with Hezbollah and Russian contractors of private companies like Wagner, which have upped their presence since 2017, these groups help to support the regime while also conducting their own policy sometimes. Iran has built bases in Syria that have been targeted by Israel, according to foreign media reports. Hezbollah is present in more than a dozen locations from eastern Syria to the north.

### **Russia:**

Russia’s air force and some troops have been seriously fighting in Syria since 2015 and helped the regime turn the tide against the rebellion. They have bases in the country. Russia has sought to draw down its soldiers and use its air power to support the regime.

### **The Syrian Opposition “The Rebels”**

#### **The Free Syrian Army:**

Founded in 2011, it is the umbrella group of opposition to the regime. It has been undermined by factionalism and the fact it has numerous small units within it. Over time it has become less relevant even though its name is used to give legitimacy to rebel units that have become less moderate over time. In the north, many of these units work closely with Turkey while near Jordan, and near the Golan borders, they work with the Jordanians and have connections with western powers and Israel.

#### **The Islamists:**

Since the beginning of the rebellion, many of the Syrian rebel groups who are rooted in the majority of Sunni community of the country have drifted towards more Islamist elements. This is generally because the moderate rebels proved ineffective. Not all these groups are Arab, some of them are Syrian Sunni Turkmen. Very few of them are Syrian Kurds. Some of these groups have committed atrocities in Syria.

### **The Islamic State “Daesh”**

Appearing in force in 2013, the Islamic State grew exponentially in 2014 and 2015 as it absorbed around 50,000 foreign fighters, most of whom travelled via Turkey illegally into Syria. Using captured Syrian army supplies, it expanded down the Euphrates and into Iraq, committing genocide against minorities. It was stopped in 2015 by a combination of US-led coalition airstrikes and the resistance of Kurdish

YPG fighters in Kobani and Shia militias in Iraq. By 2018 it had lost ninety-nine per cent of its “caliphate” and exists in a few small pockets near the Iraqi border and near the Golan. The lasting effects of ISIS will be felt for years. It destroyed archaeological sites such as Palmyra and laced the landscape with IEDs.

The group is a violent militaristic, expansionist, and anti-Shi'a terrorist group consisting of insurgents and foreign fighters active in the countries known as Iraq and Syria, and has many affiliated groups operating in other countries, most notably Libya and Nigeria (with the group Boko Haram).

A crucial factor in the emergence of DAESH was the chaos, power vacuum, and the subsequent discriminatory Shi'a-dominated government backed by the US and its Coalition in the wake of the second Iraq war. The corrupt government led by Nouri al-Maliki alienated and disenfranchised huge portions of Iraqi Sunni populations, despite the US attempts to increase Sunni involvement in the government such as the Sunni Awakening.

In 2014, DAESH seized a significant amount of turf in Syria and Iraq and declared the occupied territories they controlled to be a sovereign state and a new Caliphate under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The Iraqi Army under the Western-backed government was a highly corrupt institution and was unable to stop even a qualitatively worse opponent. Local jihadist bands in the non-contiguous areas of Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Libya, Algeria, the Philippines, the Caucasus and several Central Asian Republics of the Russian Federation have sworn allegiance to the Caliphate and many now are considered by the Islamic State as provinces. Nigeria's Boko Haram movement has expressed support for Baghdadi as Caliph and has ostensibly been accepted by Daesh as part of the Islamic State. Daesh also boasts legions of lone-wolf operatives worldwide in the global jihad.

### **The Syrian Democratic Forces**

Originally composed of the YPG and other allied units, this force grew out of resistance to ISIS. It was supported by the US and the West and received weapons, liberating ISIS's capital of Raqqa in 2017. The US seeks to portray this group as a united force of various groups, as opposed to “Kurdish” which was its original YPG component.

### **YPG/People's Protection Units:**

The YPG is the military wing of the Kurdish political party PYD. The group has approximately 50000 fighters and many foreign volunteers. The YPG appeared as a force in the Syrian civil war in 2012 after the Syrian Arab Army withdrew from Kurdish cities.

The YPG didn't take an offensive posture in the Syrian war at first. Aiming generally to defend Kurdish-majority areas, it avoided fighting other forces within the areas around them. The YPG changed this policy when Ras al-Ayn was captured by the al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat Al-Nusra. The People's Protection Units started attacking surrounding areas under government control to stop the FSA from gaining more power in the region. But the YPG mostly fought against jihadist groups. The battle of Ras al-Ayn ended in July 2013 with a YPG victory.

The inter-rebel conflict throughout the Syrian civil war led to open war between the FSA and ISIS in January 2014. The YPG worked together with the FSA to fight ISIS in Ar-Raqqah province. However, the general outcome of this fight were immense advances by ISIS that separated the eastern part of Rojava from the remaining parts. ISIS continued its success by attacking the YPG in Kobanî canton in March 2014 and fighting its way to the outskirts of Kobanî in September 2014.

With the world fearing a massacre during the siege of Kobanî, the US-led coalition began close air support to the YPG. Whereas most analysts expected ISIS to quickly crush the Kurds in Kobanî, the YPG placed up a stunning and determined resistance, which ultimately led to the victory of YPG forces.

With American air support, YPG forces started offensives near Hasakah and to the west of Hasakah which culminated in the conquest of border city Tell Abyad, linking up Kobanî with Hasakah in July 2015. After this offensives, Kurdish forces had begun to make advances into areas that didn't have a Kurdish majority.

### **YPG/Women Protection Unit:**

The Women's Protection Units (YPJ) is a Kurdish military group that was established in 2012 as the female brigade of the YPG militia. The YPG and YPJ are the armed wing of the Kurdish PYD that has taken the control over large areas in Syria's north known as Rojava.

The organization grew out of the Kurdish resistance movement and by now has 10,000 volunteer female fighters between the ages of 18 and 40.

The YPJ joined its brother organization YPG in the fight against jihadist militias in the Syrian civil war. The Women's Protection Units play a big role in the general fight against ISIS and in the battle of Kobani.

### **Jaysh Al-Thuwar/Army of Revolutionaries**

Jaysh al-Thuwar is an armed rebel group, participating in the Syrian Civil War. They consider themselves as a militia uniting Arabs, Turkmens and Kurds. The group has roughly 3000 fighters.

Although the Army of Revolutionaries consistently emphasized that they are part of the FSA, the group still got in open conflict with jihadist and rebel militias. The reason for hostility was the alliance between Jaysh al-Thuwar and the Kurdish YPG. Subsequently, the Army of Revolutionaries further deepened its bonds with the YPG and joined the SDF.

### **Jaysh al-Sanadid**

Jaysh al-Sanadid is a militia formed by the Arab Shammar tribe to fight against the ISIS and other jihadist groups. The Shammar tribe is based in Jazaa and Til Koçer regions of the Cizîr Canton of Rojava and also in Iraq. The Al-Sanadid Forces are associated with the tribal leader and governor of Jazirah district Hamidi Daham al-Hadi.

The militia has around 9000 fighters and joined the Syrian Democratic Forces in late 2015.

## **VI. The Islamic State**

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, officially as the Islamic State (IS) is a Salafi jihadist militant group that follows a fundamentalist, Salafi doctrine of Sunni Islam. IS gained global prominence in early 2014 when it drove Iraqi government forces out of key cities in its Western Iraq offensive, followed by its capture of Mosul and the Sinjar massacre. The group has been designated a terrorist organization by the **United Nations** and many individual countries. ISIS is widely known for its videos of beheadings and other types of executions of both soldiers and civilians, including journalists and aid workers, and its destruction of cultural heritage sites. The United Nations holds IS responsible for human rights abuses and war crimes. IS also committed ethnic cleansing on a historic scale in northern Iraq.

On 29 June 2014, ISIL proclaimed itself to be a worldwide caliphate. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, known by his supporters as Amir al-Mu'minin, Caliph Ibrahim – was named its caliph, and the group renamed itself ("Islamic State" (IS)). As a "**Caliphate**", it "claims" religious, political and military authority over all Muslims worldwide. The concept of it being a caliphate and the name "Islamic State" have been rejected by governments and Muslim leaders worldwide.

In June and July 2014, Jordan and Saudi Arabia moved troops to their borders with Iraq, after the Iraqi government lost control of (or withdrew from) strategic crossing points that then came under the control of either ISIS or tribes that supported it. There was speculation that Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki had ordered a withdrawal of troops from the Iraq–Saudi crossings in order "to increase pressure on Saudi Arabia and bring the threat of ISIS over-running its borders as well".

In July 2014, ISIL recruited more than 6,300 fighters, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, some of whom were thought to have previously fought for the Free Syrian Army. In September 2014, the group began kidnapping people for ransom.

By June 2015, ISIS had also established official "provinces" in Libya, Egypt (Sinai Peninsula), Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Algeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria and the North Caucasus. ISIL received pledges of allegiance and publish media releases from groups in countries like Somalia, Bangladesh and the Philippines, but it has not announced any further official branches, instead of identifying new affiliates as simply "soldiers of the caliphate".

**Al-Nusra Front** or **Jabhat al-Nusra**, known as Jabhat Fatah al-Sham also described as al-Qaeda in Syria, was a Salafist jihadist organization fighting against Syrian government forces in the Syrian Civil War. Its aim was to establish an Islamic state in the country.

Formed in 2012, in November of that year, The Washington Post described al-Nusra as "the most aggressive and successful" of the rebel forces. In December 2012, the United States Department of State designated it a foreign terrorist organization, and in November 2013, it became the official Syrian branch of al-Qaeda.

In March 2015, the group joined with other jihadist groups to form the Army of Conquest. In July 2016, al-Nusra formally re-branded as Jabhat Fatah al-Sham ("Front for the Conquest of the Levant"). On 28 January 2017, following violent clashes with Ahrar al-Sham and other rebel groups, Al-Nusra Front merged with four other groups to become Hayat Tahrir al-Sham.

By December 2015, the Islamic State covered a vast landlocked territory in western Iraq and eastern Syria, with a population estimate of 2.8 to 8 million people.

## **VII. ISIS' Effects & It's Future**

The Syrian Democratic Forces declared victory over Islamic State in Syria, ending the group's self-declared caliphate that once stretched across the country and neighbouring Iraq. After rising to power in 2014, ISIS once controlled a territory in Iraq and Syria as large as the United Kingdom, but that land has been recaptured by collective Iraqi security forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces in Syria, backed by a 79-member international Coalition led by the United States.

The collapse of ISIS' territorial control in Syria following their defeat to SDF forces was historic moment but still suffering for Syrians across the country and will require sustained specialist support for years to come.

The rule of the so-called Islamic State has been marked in Iraq and Syria by brutality on an appalling scale. The IRC knows from the experience of supporting civilians in Raqqa and Mosul that people living under ISIS rule will have gone through hell and need support for years to come. The IRC has been told that that the number one need for people in areas retaken from ISIS in Deir Ez Zor, ahead of even basics like electricity, is psychological support for those who suffered brutal ISIS control. Children will have witnessed extreme violence, including beheadings and violence against women, and are likely to be severely distressed. Children will also urgently require access to education in order to return to a sense of normalcy and have a chance of a future. Whatever the possible crimes of the parents, the more than 3,500 foreign children languishing at camps across northeast Syria are clearly innocent victims of the conflict and should be repatriated to their home countries in order to ensure their safety and well-being.

Across Syria, nearly 12 million people remain in need of urgent humanitarian aid. Eight years of fighting has eroded livelihoods and 8 in 10 Syrians live in abject poverty. Locations badly damaged by war will need to see massive improvements in jobs, education, and physical infrastructure including demining to make these areas safe to live in once again. Needs remain particularly acute in areas that fell under Government of Syria control over the past year including Dar'a and Eastern Ghouta. As for the so-called Islamic State, it needs to be understood for what it believes and argues not just the area it governs. It fed on perceptions of unfairness in Sunni communities. Its ideology remains a potent threat to stability unless the wellsprings of its support are addressed.”

In 2018, the IRC provided lifesaving support to close to 1 million people, half of them children, across Syria.

Beginning in 2016, the Islamic State lost ground nearly as quickly as it had captured it. In Iraq, security forces backed by the United States, and elsewhere Iranian-backed Shiite militias, ousted the group, retaking Mosul in mid-2017 and officially declaring the group defeated in the country by the end of the year. American-backed, Kurdish-

led forces regained territory in Syria, including Raqqa in October 2017. Along Syria's eastern border, forces backed by the Assad government and Russia also took back territory. But many of the cities once held by the Islamic State are shells of their former selves. In Raqqa, two-thirds of the city was destroyed in the coalition fight against the group. In Mosul, centuries-old mosques and markets were reduced to rubble. But even as the territory has been wrested from the Islamic State, the group has continued to spread its ideology online and encouraged supporters to carry out attacks worldwide. While the state it once declared has largely disappeared, it remains a significant threat.

It is unclear how many ISIS fighters fled the shrinking territory and are now capable of waging an insurgency in the region. Western hostages, including the British journalist John Cantlie, remain missing, and millions of refugees from Syria are still unable or unwilling to return home while President Bashar al-Assad remains in power with the backing of Russia.

Also uncertain is the future for thousands of suspected ISIS captives in SDF custody or those facing trial, and death sentences in Iraq, as well as foreign fighters whose home countries are reluctant to repatriate and try them for crimes against the Iraqi and Syrian people.

## **VIII. Peace Talks: Past and Present**

The Syrian peace process is the ensemble of initiatives and plans to resolve the Syrian Civil War, which has been ongoing in Syria since 2011 and has spilled beyond its borders. The peace process has been moderated by the Arab League, the UN Special Envoy on Syria, Russia and Western powers.[1] The negotiating parties to end the conflict are typical representatives of the Syrian government and Syrian opposition, while the Western-backed Kurdish forces have stayed out of the framework of the negotiations.

### **Arab League peace plans: 2011-2012**

In November 2011–January 2012, the Arab League (AL) twice tried to accomplish an end to Syrian government (and opposition) violence and convince both parties to start talks instead of fighting.

After an agreement of the Syrian government to the AL plan of 19 December, the AL sent a monitoring mission to Syria. Violence continued and Saudi Arabia on 22 January withdrew its monitors from the mission and called on Russia, China and all other states to pressure Syria strongly to adhere to the AL peace plan. The Arab League on 28 January 2012 ended its monitoring mission.

### **Russian Peace Initiatives:**

2012 'informal talks' proposal

On January 30, 2012, the Russian foreign ministry suggested "informal" talks in Moscow between the Syrian government and opposition and said the Syrian authorities had already agreed to the Russian offer. Abdel Baset Seda, a member of the Syrian National Council's executive committee, told Reuters that the SNC had not

received any formal invitation for such talks, but would decline if one arrived: "Our position has not changed and it is that there is no dialogue with (President Bashar al-Assad)".

February 2012: offering the fall of Assad

In February 2012 Martti Ahtisaari held talks with envoys of the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. During those discussions, the Russian ambassador, Vitaly Churkin, proposed a three-point plan, which would bring the Syrian government and opposition to the negotiation table and result in Assad stepping down as president. But, according to Ahtisaari, US, Britain and France rejected that proposal, being convinced that the fall of Assad's government was inevitable. "It was an opportunity lost in 2012," he said in an interview in September 2015. Other Western diplomats refute Ahtisaari's claims, with one stating, "I very much doubt the P3 [the US, UK and France] refused or dismissed any such strategy offer at the time. The questions were more to do with sequencing – the beginning or end of the process – and with Russia's ability to deliver – to get Assad to step down."

Brokerage Proposal, 2013

On 7 November 2013. Russia again announced it was trying to broker talks in Moscow between the Syrian government and opposition, seeing that the U.S. and Russian negotiators failed to agree on whether or not Assad should be forced out of office. Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Bogdanov said the Moscow talks could focus on humanitarian problems as well on some political issues.

Friends of Syria Group, February 2012

In February 2012, the then French President Sarkozy initiated an international "contact group" to find a solution for the Syrian conflict, after Russia and China had vetoed a 4 February 2012 UN Security Council resolution. The group held four meetings, all in the year 2012.

Kofi Annan Peace Plan, March 2012

The Kofi Annan (Joint Special Envoy for the United Nations and the Arab League) peace plan, launched in March 2012, intended to commit both the Syrian government and opposition to a cease-fire and commit the Syrian government to initiate deliberations with the opposition on their aspirations and concerns. After Annan on 12 April had assumed that both parties had agreed to a cease-fire, the UN already on 1 May had to admit that both parties were violating it.

**Geneva I: June 2012**

An "action group" conference (now referred to as Geneva I Conference on Syria) was held on Saturday 30 June 2012, in Geneva, initiated by the then UN peace envoy to Syria Kofi Annan, and attended by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, a representative of China, British Foreign Secretary Hague, and Kofi Annan. Mr. Annan said that the conference agreed on the need for a "transitional government body with full executive powers" which could include members of the present Syrian government and of the opposition. All five permanent members of the UN Security Council; the US, Russia, China, France and the UK –

supported Mr. Annan's efforts. Clinton, however, suggested that Syrian dictator Assad could, in such a transitional government, not remain in power, which immediately was contradicted by Lavrov. The Geneva talks were condemned by Ahrar al-Sham leader Hassan Abboud.

### **Geneva II: 2014**

The Geneva II Middle East peace conference was a United Nations (UN) backed international (peace) conference, aimed at bringing the Syrian government and opposition together to discuss a transitional government. Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN special envoy to Syria, tried to pursue the conference in close cooperation with the U.S. and Russia. It started on 22 January 2014 and ended on 31 January; no agreement was reached.

### **Astana Opposition Conference: 2015**

On 25-27 May 2015, a number of Syrian Opposition groups convened in Astana, Kazakhstan. The conference was held at the request of opposition figures to Kazakhstan's president Nursultan Nazarbayev. The Syrian government chose not to attend. A second conference was held in Astana on 2-4 October 2015; the assembled Opposition groups adopted a declaration that called for the parliamentary election scheduled for 2016 to be held under the supervision of the international community; Nursultan Nazarbayev was asked to step in as a mediator in the Syrian conflict.

### **Vienna Process: 2015**

On 23 October 2015, the Foreign Ministers of the United States, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Turkey met and talked in Vienna, Austria, to find a way to end the Syrian conflict. On 30 October 2015, the first round of the Syria peace talks were held in Vienna with foreign ministers of 20 countries participating: U.S., Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, China, United Kingdom, France, Italy, Germany and other countries. The ministers agreed on the need of the Syrian government and opposition to start political talks. The second round of the Vienna talks held in mid-November produced an agreement on the need to convene Syrian government and opposition representatives in formal negotiations under UN auspices with a target date of 1 January 2016.

On 18 December 2015, the UN Security Council, having overcome the gridlock on Syria that had persisted since October 2011, unanimously passed Resolution 2254 (2015), endorsing the ISSG's transitional plan that set out a timetable for formal talks and a unity government within six months; the resolution put UN special envoy Staffan de Mistura in charge of organising Syria talks. However, the major powers remained divided on who should represent the Syrian opposition; no mention was made of the future role of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

### **Riyadh Conference: 2015**

On 10 December 2015, a two-day meeting started in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, aiming at unifying Syria's opposition groups and forming an opposition

delegation for the planned negotiations with the Syrian government. Syrian Kurdish factions were not represented at the meeting in Riyadh. Al-Nusra front had not been invited because of its assumed 'terrorist links' or al-Qaeda ties.

France announced that "the Syrian opposition" had reached an agreement and had "adopted a common program" in Riyadh. Apart from France and Saudi Arabia, also Turkey and Qatar supported that 'High Negotiation Committee'. The High Negotiation Committee was tasked with identifying 15 individuals willing and able to serve on the official opposition delegation to the Geneva III negotiations, of which 3 were women. Russia, however, said that those gathered in Riyadh did not represent all opposition groups and therefore were not in a position to speak on behalf of the entire Syrian opposition.

### **Geneva III: 2016**

On Friday, 29 January 2016, a UN Peace Conference for Syria started in Geneva in Switzerland. At the first day, the Syrian government and opposition refused to sit in the same room together. On 3 February 2016, UN envoy Staffan de Mistura suspended the peace talks. Russian foreign minister Lavrov commented that "the [Syrian] opposition took a completely unconstructive position and tried to put forward preconditions". Rebel commanders were cited as saying they hoped the peace talks' collapse would "convince their foreign backers, states including Turkey and Saudi Arabia, that it was time to send them more powerful and advanced weapons, including anti-aircraft missiles".

### **Geneva IV: February-March 2017**

The Geneva IV peace talks on Syria were talks between the Syrian government and the Syrian opposition under the auspices of the United Nations. The opposition was represented by the High Negotiations Committee, while the government delegation was led by Syria's UN ambassador, Bashar Jaafari. The talks began on 23 February 2017 and concluded on 3 March. The government delegation sought to focus on counter-terrorism while the opposition sought to focus on a political transition.

### **Astana Talks: January 2017-March 2018**

On 23 December 2016, a Syrian opposition delegation that included twelve rebel factions, and Syria's government delegation headed by Bashar Jaafari convened in Astana for indirect talks titled the International Meeting on Syrian Settlement, sponsored by Russia, Turkey and Iran. The talks took place on 23 and 24 January; the first day ended without the sides reaching an agreement. "Astana Process" talks aimed to support the framework in accordance with the UN Security Council "Resolution 2254" and ended on the 24th with an agreement between Iran, Russia, and Turkey to form a joint monitoring body to work to enforce the "Resolution 2254" ceasefire. After the talks in January 2017, Russia offered a draft for a future constitution of Syria, which would turn the "Syrian Arab Republic" into the "Republic of Syria", introduce decentralized authorities as well as elements of federalism like "association areas", strengthen the parliament at the cost of the presidency, and realize secularism by abolishing Islamic jurisprudence as a source of legislation.

Two days of talks on strengthening the ceasefire regime, in the nearly six-year-old Syrian conflict ended Feb. 16 in Astana with the adoption of a document to formalise monitoring of the December 29, 2016, ceasefire agreement. The document will guide the activities of a joint operational group to be formed by Russia, Turkey and Iran that was agreed to be set up during the earlier meeting in January in Astana.

The third round of meetings in Astana held between 14 and 15 March yielded further agreement by all parties to the existing ceasefire agreement. As a result of these talks, Iran joined Turkey and Russia as a guarantor state. On 4 May 2017, at the fourth round of the Astana talks, representatives of Russia, Iran, and Turkey signed a memorandum to establish four "de-escalation zones" in Syria. The largest one of those included the Idlib Governorate and adjoining districts of Hama, Aleppo and Latakia Governorates; the other three zones were set up in the northern rebel-controlled parts of the Homs Governorate, the rebel-controlled eastern Ghouta, and along the Jordan–Syria border. The deal was not signed by the Syrian government or rebel groups; rebel representatives rejected it because it left too many loopholes for the Syrian government to continue bombing civilian areas.

The fifth round of peace talks took place on 12-15 July 2017. The Astana Process has the support of the UN's Staffan de Mistura who said the Astana talks are making "clear progress" to reducing violence in Syria. The Southern Front boycotted these talks. As a precursor to these peace talks, on 9 July 2017, an American-Russian-Jordanian brokered ceasefire commenced, though, on July 14, opposition groups participating in the Quneitra offensive rejected the ceasefire, with clashes resuming across Southern Syria. Besides minor violations from all sides involved, as of 15 July, the ceasefire has held.

The eighth round of the Astana Process on Syrian peace started in Astana. The talks aimed at ending the nearly seven-year-long conflict in the country, with the humanitarian crisis in the besieged Eastern Ghouta suburb of Damascus at the table. The head of the Syrian Arab Republic delegation called for the "immediate and unconditional withdrawal of foreign forces from Syrian territory" including Turkish and US forces.

The ninth round of the Astana Process on Syrian peace took place on 16 March 2018. The trilateral ministerial meeting on Syria was to include Iran, Russia and Turkey.

## **IX. Finding a solution to the problem: Past, Present & Future**

Syria's membership to the League of Arab States was suspended in September of 2011 after the escalation of conflict between the then-protesters and the Syrian government. The vacant seat was allowed to be filled in March 2013 by a delegate of the Syrian opposition forces (Droubi). The League has also implemented sanctions against the Syrian government and deployed an observer mission to the conflict in the winter of 2011. On March 28, 2013, the United Nations passed the Arms Trade Treaty with the purpose of limiting conventional arms sales to states participating in human rights abuses (Lagon). But this has had little impact on the conflict due to neither Iran nor Syria signing the treaty and none of the current states providing arms ratifying the treaty of their own accord.

The past year has seen the deployment of international troops and specialized anti-missile defensive assets into the region in order to de-escalate tensions along Syria's border regions and deter further aggression by combatants in expanding the theatre of conflict. NATO forces have deployed Patriot air defence systems along Turkey's southern border in response to multiple cross-border firing incidents which left several casualties. The United States has also deployed multiple Patriot batteries along with troops in Jordan in order to assist with border security and provide technical support and training for the Jordanian military.

## X. Questions To Consider In Your Research

- What is your state's position on supporting either side of the conflict?
- How is the conflict affecting your state: border security, political stability, refugee support, economic stability?
- What are your state's policy positions on arms trafficking, chemical weapons and intervention?
- Is your state a signatory to international arms agreements, and if so, to which agreements is it bound?

## XI. Questions A Resolution Might Answer

- How can the Arab League prevent spillover violence while maintaining member states' sovereignty?
- What standards should the Arab League use for determining if or when a member state should provide military assistance to groups involved in the conflict?
- Can or should states and organizations outside of the Arab League intervene in the conflict?
- What forms of constraints should the League implement in order to maintain regional order?

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