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"Achieving SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) in line with the 2030 United Nations agenda."

Committee: United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

Agenda Item: The Syrian Civil War

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Position: President Chair

Introduction

The Syrian Civil War has its roots back to 2011 when public demands for reform turned into an armed uprising due to harsh state repression. The conflict was sparked by protests during the Arab Spring and a violent government response. However, the conflict does not solely revolve around Syria as it includes many national players; the Assad regime, opposition groups, Kurdish forces, jihadists, and also foreign powers like Russia, Iran, Türkiye, and the United States of America. Colliding interests of these actors have divided the country and made a political resolution even more difficult to achieve.

Territorial division in Syria can be grouped into 3 zones, which are the government that holds control over major cities, the opposition located mainly in Idlib, and the Kurdish forces which mainly hold power over the northeast region of the state. The core issue in the fragmentation is that no side can achieve full victory, no unified government controls the whole country, and none of the sides is willing to reach a comprehensive solution.

Although internal factors have a huge impact on the crisis, it is also external powers that have intervened militarily and politically, each supporting different sides, which further increases division within the country. Foreign influence sustains the impasse and complicates peace efforts. Various efforts of peace talks like the Geneva and Astana processes have sadly failed to produce lasting agreements per deep mistrust and conflict agendas preventing compromise. From the humanitarian kaleidoscope, millions of Syrians have been killed, displaced, or require aid.

Even without the war and major fighting, humanitarian costs continue to rise due to longstanding poverty, displacement, and lack of sanctions in the whereabouts of the region. In conclusion, the Syrian conflict has reached a "frozen stage", meaning major battles have stopped, but the underlying tensions remain unresolved. The country is fractured into zones of control, each backed by different international actors. Efforts to reach a political solution have stalled, leaving Syria in a state of limbo with continued suffering, no precise move forward, and no clear path to peace.

Under the United Nations Charter, the powers and duties of the Security Council are to maintain international peace and security per the principles and purposes of the United Nations; to investigate any dispute or situation which might lead to international friction; to recommend methods of adjusting such disputes or the terms of settlement; to formulate plans for the establishment of a system to regulate armaments; to determine the existence of a threat to the peace or act of aggression and to recommend which action should be taken; to call on Members to apply economic sanctions and other measures not involving the use of force to prevent or stop aggression; to take military action against an aggressor; to recommend the admission of new Members; to exercise the trusteeship functions of the United Nations in "strategic areas" and to advise the General Assembly the appointment of the Secretary General and together with the Assembly, to elect the Judges of the International Court of Justice.

Definition of Significant Terms

Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)

HTS is a dangerous opposition force throughout the duration of the conflict. It is led by Ahmed-al-Sharaa (formerly known as Abu Mohhamad al-Josani). Once an Al-Qaeda affiliate, the group rebranded and led the final offensive that ousted Assad. It now heads the transitional administration. In 2017, HTS was formed out of multiple organizations, including Al-Nusra Front, an Al-Qaeda affiliate. The UN has recognized HTS as a terrorist organization. In recent times, HTS has tried to change the outside perception as they promised to protect the rights of Syria's religious minorities. Following the December 2024 fall of the Assad regime, HTS has transitioned from a rebellious militia to the leading force in Syria's transitional government. They aim to lead a "New Syria" based on an interim constitution. Another goal for them is to dissolve various rebel militias and integrate them into a unified, formal Syrian Ministry of Defence. HTS has actively fought against ISIS sleeper cells, positioning itself as a partner for regional security.

Daesh

Islamic State, also known as Daesh or ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) is a proscribed terrorist group that from 2014 to 2019 seized and controlled large amounts of territory in Syria

and Iraq. It poses a threat to the world through its violent ideology and network of terrorist fighters. An international group with 89 partners - the Global Coalition against Daesh - was formed in 2014 to defeat the group and ensure it did not recover.

People's Protection Units (YPG)

The YPG, or the People's Protection Units, emerged as a powerful armed group during the Syrian civil war, which began in 2011. It established a foothold in the north as Syrian government forces withdrew to put down the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad elsewhere. It is affiliated to the main Syrian Kurdish faction, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), and has a female counterpart, the YPJ. YPG control was initially concentrated in three predominantly Kurdish regions of northern Syria - known in Kurdish as Rojava. The area is home to roughly 2 million Kurds, and Kurdish-led authorities have established autonomous governing bodies there since the start of the Syrian war.

Assad Regime

Assad's regime was a highly personalist dictatorship that governed Syria as a totalitarian police state. Under Assad, Syria became a hereditary dictatorship. After his death in 2000, his son Bashar al-Assad succeeded him and ruled until his overthrow in 2024. It committed systemic human rights violations and war crimes, making it one of the most repressive regimes in modern times. After the fall of the Assad regime, a new interim constitution was implemented and remains in effect today.

Cross-Border Aid

Cross-border humanitarian assistance is a critical component of global efforts to provide relief and support to vulnerable populations affected by crises, conflicts, and natural disasters. However, delivering aid across national boundaries presents unique challenges that can hinder the equitable distribution of resources.Issues such as political barriers, logistical complexities, security concerns, and coordination difficulties can impede the timely and effective delivery of humanitarian aid. Director of Coordination of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, stressed that "cross-border aid is a matter of life and death for millions of people in north-west Syria". He emphasized that cross-border operations in north-west Syria have always

been, and must continue to be, guided by the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.

Arab Spring

Arab Spring, wave of pro-democracy protests and uprisings that took place in the Middle East and North Africa beginning in 2010 and 2011, challenging some of the region's entrenched authoritarian regimes. The wave began when protests in Tunisia and Egypt toppled their regimes in quick succession, inspiring similar attempts in other Arab countries. Not every country saw success in the protest movement, however, and demonstrators expressing their political and economic grievances were often met with violent crackdowns by their countries' security forces.

Caliphate

An Islamic form of government in which political and religious leadership is united, and the head of state (the Caliph) is a successor to the Prophet Muhammad.

Incursion

A sudden attack or an act of going into a place, especially across a border.

Sectarianism

 Powerful support for the religious or political group that you are a member of, which can cause problems between different groups.

Detailed Background of the Issue

Background and Escalation:

The Syrian conflict erupted in 2011 as part of the wider Arab Spring movement, when Syrians took to the streets demanding political reforms and greater freedoms. The Assad government responded with harsh repression, leading to violent clashes and the militarization of the opposition. What began as a popular uprising quickly escalated into a multi-faceted civil war involving numerous armed groups, sectarian divisions, and widespread devastation. Over the years, Syria became a battleground for regional and global powers. The rise of extremist groups

like ISIS further complicated the conflict, drawing in international coalitions. Russia and Iran emerged as key supporters of the Assad regime, providing military and financial backing, while the United States and Türkiye supported various opposition and Kurdish forces. These interventions intensified the fighting and fragmented Syria's territory into zones controlled by different actors. By 2020, large-scale military offensives had largely ceased, and frontlines stabilized, marking the start of a "frozen conflict." Despite the absence of major fighting, no comprehensive peace agreement or political settlement has been achieved. The country remains divided among three main areas: Assad's government in the west, Turkish-backed opposition in the northwest, and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces in the northeast, each backed by different foreign powers. The prolonged conflict has led to one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with millions displaced internally and as refugees abroad. The situation worsened with the 2023 earthquake and ongoing economic collapse exacerbated by sanctions. The population faces food insecurity, poverty, and limited access to healthcare. Political deadlock, lack of reconstruction, and the continued presence of foreign forces hinder prospects for peace and recovery. Addressing the civil war involves tackling territorial fragmentation, foreign influence, humanitarian relief, and political negotiations. Efforts must focus on reviving UN-led peace talks, establishing ceasefires, promoting power-sharing or decentralization, and supporting grassroots reconciliation. The challenge remains balancing the competing interests of local actors and international stakeholders to achieve a sustainable resolution.

Resolutions

Throughout the year many resolutions have been imposed to deal with the case which can be a lens to show the issue at hand. UNSC Resolution 2118, adopted on 27 September 2013, addressed the use of chemical weapons in Syria, following a deadly attack in Ghouta. The resolution required the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons stockpile under international supervision and demanded Syria's full compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention. It also warned of potential measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter (which allows for enforcement actions) if Syria failed to cooperate

UNSC Resolution 2254 18 December 2015, outlines a roadmap for a political solution to the Syrian conflict. It calls for a ceasefire, the drafting of a new constitution, and free and fair

elections under UN supervision within 18 months. The resolution emphasizes a Syrian-led, UN-facilitated process and remains the main framework for international peace efforts in Syria.

The next is UNSC Resolution 2401 - 24 February 2018. This resolution demanded a 30-day nationwide ceasefire across Syria to allow for unhindered humanitarian access and medical evacuations, especially in besieged areas like Eastern Ghouta. It called on all parties to comply with international humanitarian law. Despite its adoption, violations of the ceasefire followed shortly after.

UNSC Resolution 2533- 11 July 2020 renewed authorization for cross-border humanitarian aid into Syria, particularly through the Bab al-Hawa crossing from Turkey. It allowed the UN to deliver aid to millions in northwest Syria without the Syrian government's approval. The resolution passed after a contentious debate and was a compromise between Russia, China and Western nations.

UNSC Resolution 2642- 12 July 2022 extended the humanitarian cross-border aid mechanism into northwest Syria for six months. It ensured continued UN access to opposition-held areas where millions rely on outside assistance. The resolution highlighted the fragile balance between humanitarian need and political disagreements in the Security Council.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Description of Event
2011	The uprising begins as pro-democracy protests erupt during the Arab Spring. The Assad regime cracks down violently, protests spread nationwide, and armed opposition groups begin forming as repression intensifies.
2012	Major cities like Aleppo and Damascus experience intense fighting.

2013	Use of chemical weapons kills hundreds, which leads to the U.S.A. and Russia agreeing on a chemical weapons removal deal.
2014	ISIS declares a caliphate across Syria and Iraq. U.S.-led coalition begins airstrikes against ISIS.
2015	Russia begins direct military intervention in support of Assad, and the Syrian regime starts regaining territory.
2016	With Russia's support, the Syrian government retakes eastern Aleppo.
2017	Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) backed by the U.S. capture Raqqa from ISIS and de-escalation zones negotiated in Astana talks with the participation of Russia, Iran, and Türkiye.
2019	U.S. withdraws troops from parts of northern Syria; Turkey launches incursion, a sudden invasion against Kurdish forces. ISIS loses its last territory in Baghouz as conflict lines begin to freeze
2020	Russia and Türkiye broker a ceasefire in Idlib, and frontlines stabilize, with occasional clashes.
2023-Present	Conflict remains "frozen" as there are no major military offensives, but also no peace settlements. Zones of control persist with the Assad regime, Turkish-backed opposition in the northwest, and Kurdish-led SDF in the northeast with limited U.S. support. The humanitarian crisis worsens day by day due to the earthquake that occurred in 2023, as well as the collapse of sanctions and the economy.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Syria:

Syria is at the center of the conflict, with President Bashar al-Assad's regime fighting to regain full control of the country. Since the war began in 2011, Assad's government has relied on support from allies like Russia and Iran to survive and push back opposition and Kurdish forces. Today, the Syrian government controls most of the country's major cities and western territory. Assad's forces have committed significant human rights abuses, including sieges, chemical attacks, and mass arrests, which have drawn international condemnation. Despite holding the UN seat, Assad lacks control over large areas in the north and east. The regime's goal remains full territorial reunification under its rule.

Türkiye:

 Türkiye plays a major role in northern Syria, primarily supporting opposition groups and directly intervening militarily to counter Kurdish influence near its border. It considers the Kurdish-led SDF and its backbone, the YPG, to be extensions of the PKK, a Kurdish separatist group outlawed in Türkiye. Ankara has launched several cross-border operations to push Kurdish forces southward and establish buffer zones, also hosting millions of Syrian refugees. Türkiye supports factions within the Syrian National Army, a coalition of anti-Assad rebels, and maintains military presence in Idlib and parts of northern Aleppo. While Türkiye is opposed to both Kurdish autonomy and the Assad regime, it increasingly coordinates with Russia and Iran on managing conflict zones.

United States of America:

The United States has focused mainly on defeating ISIS and supporting the Kurdish-led SDF, which it sees as the most effective ground force in that fight. While the U.S. initially backed some moderate opposition groups, that support has mostly faded. Washington maintains a small troop presence in eastern Syria, primarily to counter ISIS remnants and limit Iranian influence. The U.S. does not support the Assad regime and has imposed sanctions on it, but also discourages full Turkish offensives against Kurdish forces.

Russia:

Russia is the strongest foreign backer of the Assad regime, entering the conflict in 2015 with direct military intervention. Russian airstrikes, advisors, and diplomatic cover have allowed Assad to regain key territories, including Aleppo and parts of southern Syria. Moscow seeks to maintain its influence in the Middle East and preserve its naval base in Tartus, Syria's only port with direct access to the Mediterranean. Russia also presents itself as a power broker, participating in both military operations and diplomatic talks (like the Astana Process). Though it coordinates with Türkiye and sometimes Iran, its core objective is the survival and eventual territorial consolidation of the Assad government.

Iran:

Iran has been a close ally of the Assad regime since the start of the war, viewing Syria as a vital part of its regional strategy. Tehran supports Assad with financial aid, military advisors, and proxy forces, including Hezbollah from Lebanon and Shiite militias from Iraq and Afghanistan. Iran sees Syria as a corridor to Lebanon and a means to project influence against Israel and Gulf rivals. Its involvement has deepened the sectarian dimensions of the conflict and drawn opposition from the U.S., Israel, and Türkiye. Iran also participates in diplomatic efforts to shape post-war Syria in ways that preserve its strategic gains.

Iraq:

Iraq shares a long border with Syria and has been impacted heavily by ISIS's cross-border activity. While the Iraqi government does not play a central military role in Syria, it cooperates with both Iran and the U.S. in fighting ISIS. Some Iraqi militias, aligned with Iran, have crossed into Syria to support Assad.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

United Nations-backed Attempt in Geneva

The first ever peace talks were launched by the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland in 2012. With the United States, Turkey, and Gulf countries supporting the different parties. Assad's ally

Iran wasn't invited to the talks. The final resolution of the first Geneva talks allowed the parties to discuss Assad's removal during a transition period. This failed, one of many to come. By 2015, Assad began consolidating his position with Russian and Iranian backing. Again, UN-mediated talks collapsed in 2017 when the Syrian regime delegation refused to discuss the constitutional process and presidential elections. Blaming the regime for the failure of the negotiations, UN special envoy Staffan de Mistura said if the regime continues "not willing to meet anyone who has a different opinion" it will be difficult to make progress.

The Second Attempt in Astana

With the Geneva talks failing, Iran excluded and Turkey at odds with America over its support of the YPG, a new channel emerged. Talks between Russia, Turkey, and Iran followed in the Kazakh capital of Astana in 2016 with the leadership of Russia, Iran, and Turkey. The meeting in Astana brought the strongest fighting opposition groups on the field together and made them sit with the regime for the first time since the beginning of the war. Astana yielded more results than the Geneva talks as the three guarantor countries, Iran, Russia and Turkey agreed on "de-escalation zones" in a bid to stop violence in mainly opposition-held areas. Even though the agreement reduced the violence temporarily, the agreement failed to be fully implemented as the Syrian regime continued its air strikes on so-called de-escalation areas. Turkey and Russia took the lead in using their leverage over the opposition and the regime, respectively. Meanwhile, the US-backed SDF, a YPG-dominated ground force, became the main tool of the US-led coalition's fight against Daesh. The US's decision to use the YPG resulted in an escalation of tensions between Turkey and the US. The YPG is the Syrian affiliate of the PKK, which has been designated a terrorist organisation in Turkey, the US, and the EU.

Russia-led Talks in Sochi

With Daesh in retreat, Russia then launched a new series of talks on Syria in Russia's Sochi, asserting its power as a dominant player. It was again the Astana trio: Turkey, as the opposition's guarantor, Syrian regime's ally Iran, and Russia that brokered the talks. But this time, Assad's removal from power, which was discussed during the Geneva talks, was not a precondition for the talks. The Syrian opposition refused to take part in the meeting as a result. The talks in Sochi

mainly focused on the future of Syria, a possible constitution, and a roadmap to create a demilitarized zone. The deal has not been fully implemented as Syrian regime forces have violated the deal in several areas within the designated buffer zone, and no clear progress has been made about a new constitution after a decision to establish a constitutional committee made up of 150 candidates.

Four-way Summit in İstanbul

Leaders from Russia, France, and Germany will be hosted in a summit in Istanbul, part of a new attempt to reach a political solution in war-devastated Syria. With the involvement of European countries that have experienced a massive influx of refugees, the summit's focus is expected to be on refugees. Turkey is already sheltering 3.5 million Syrian refugees. Both France and Germany are in agreement with the Astana principles of supporting a demilitarized zone. Turkey's presidential aide Ibrahim Kalin said in a statement that the focus of the meeting would be preserving last month's deal on Idlib, the last major opposition-held stronghold, and preventing violations by the Assad regime in the area. UN agencies and international non-governmental organisations have voiced concerns that a regime offensive on Idlib could create a further refugee influx. In September, Russia and Turkey agreed to establish a demilitarized zone in the area and carry out joint patrols to prevent further fighting. Following the deal, the Turkish Defence Ministry announced the removal of heavy weapons from the area. Ahead of the summit, Syrian rebels traded fire with regime forces in northern Syria overnight, their "fiercest" exchanges since a demilitarised zone deal was announced for the area last month, the war monitor Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Alternative Solutions

Resolving the frozen conflict in Syria requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses political, security, humanitarian, and social dimensions. One of the most important steps is reviving the UN-led peace process, which aims to bring all Syrian parties to the negotiating table to agree on a political transition and a new constitution. However, deep mistrust among factions and competing international interests pose significant obstacles to progress. Another practical solution is decentralizing power through regional autonomy or power-sharing agreements. This

would acknowledge Syria's diverse communities and reduce conflict by giving local groups more control over their affairs. Yet, this approach faces resistance from the Assad regime and foreign actors wary of losing influence, making consensus difficult to achieve. International diplomatic cooperation among key foreign powers is also vital. A coordinated agreement could align their interests toward stability, potentially involving troop withdrawals and limits on military activities. But rivalries and conflicting ambitions make such agreements complicated and fragile.Establishing a monitored ceasefire and designated security zones could help stop violence and protect civilians, creating space for political dialogue. Enforcing such ceasefires is challenging given the multiple armed groups and lack of trust, and would require broad international backing and consent from local actors.Humanitarian relief and economic support remain crucial to alleviate widespread suffering. Providing food, medical aid, and rebuilding infrastructure can improve daily life and create conditions more conducive to peace. However, politicization of aid, restricted access, and sanctions complicate these efforts. Accountability and transitional justice mechanisms can help promote healing by addressing war crimes and human rights abuses. Although essential for long-term reconciliation, such measures face resistance from those fearing punishment and risk reigniting tensions if not carefully managed. Finally, strengthening local governance and civil society empowers communities to manage their own affairs and fosters social cohesion. While this builds grassroots support for peace, local actors often lack resources and face security threats, highlighting the need for international support and integration with national efforts.Together, these solutions offer a comprehensive path toward ending the frozen conflict, but success depends on cooperation among Syrian parties and the sustained commitment of international stakeholders.

Useful Links

22 Months of Syria's Civil War Condensed into a 1-Minute Video

This fast-paced video offers a visual representation of the shifting frontlines and territorial control in Syria from 2017 to 2018. It provides a clear overview of the conflict's dynamics over a condensed period.

https://bigthink.com/strange-maps/22-months-of-war-condensed-in-a-1-minute-video/

Syria Civil War Recap - Old Footage of Rebels, Attacks, and Battle for Aleppo

This video presents archival footage highlighting key moments from the Syrian Civil War, focusing on the rise of rebel forces and significant battles, particularly in Aleppo.

https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x9a6iyu

Syria's Turning Point: The Fall of Assad

A comprehensive 9-minute explainer that dives into the events leading to the fall of Bashar al-Assad, examining the role of various factions and international actors.

https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x9ag3sg

Syria profile – Timeline

An in-depth timeline detailing the major events of the Syrian Civil War, including shifts in territorial control and significant battles.

https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703995

A Timeline of Events from Syria's War

This article revisits major moments from the Syrian conflict, providing context to the ongoing humanitarian crisis and political developments.

https://www.trtworld.com/video/digital/a-timeline-of-events-from-syrias-war-18245820

Syria Revolution: A Timeline of How the Country Got Here

 A detailed account of Syria's political landscape leading up to the revolution, offering insights into the factors that contributed to the conflict.

https://www.itv.com/news/2024-12-08/syria-revolution-a-timeline-of-how-the-country-got-here

Map of Foreign Forces in Syria

A detailed map illustrating the presence and influence of various foreign powers in Syria as of 2024.

https://jusoor.co/en/details/map-of-foreign-forces-in-syria-mid-2024

Syrian Civil War Timeline

 An infographic timeline that outlines key events and shifts in the Syrian Civil War, providing a visual representation of the conflict's progression.

https://www.thewildcatroar.com/news/2015/12/14/syrian-civil-war-timeline/

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