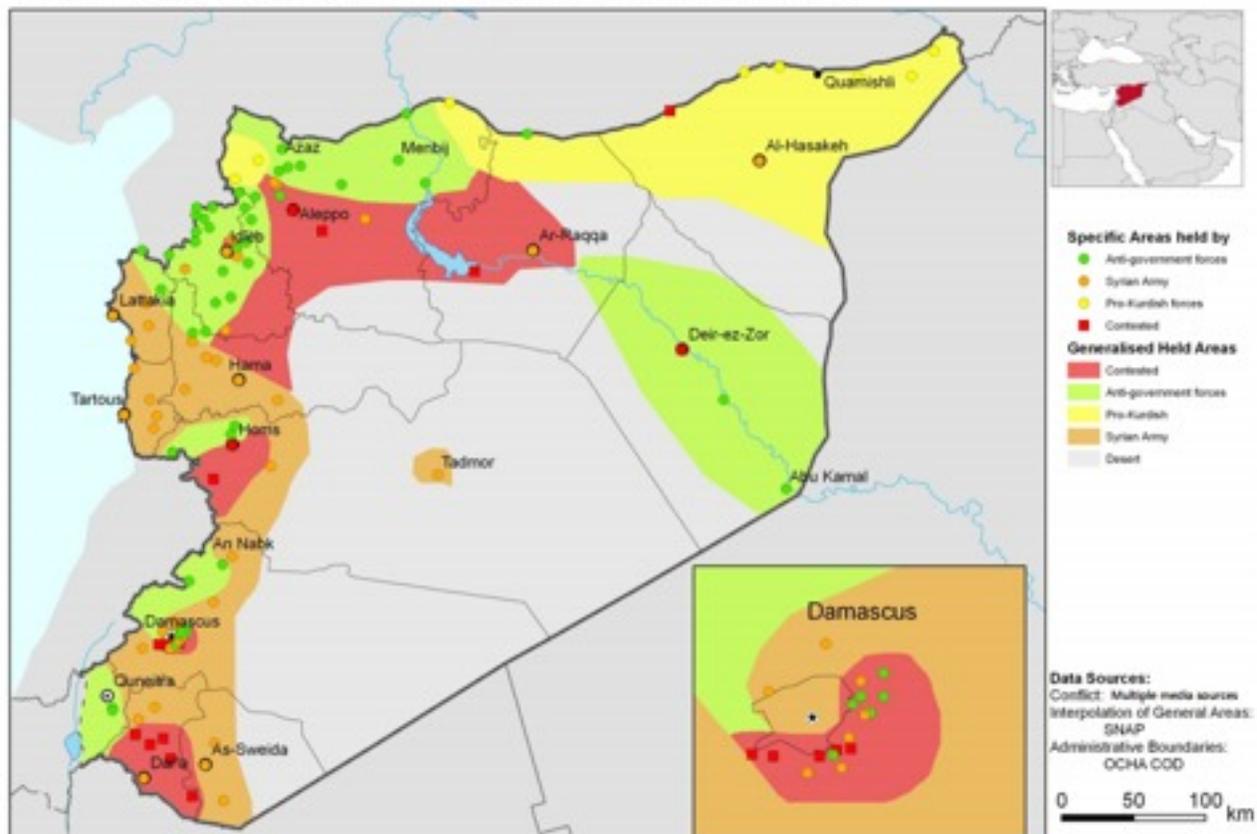


Forum: International Security Council

Issue: The situation in Syria

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Government and Anti-government Held Areas as at January 14th 2013



Introduction

Unlike other more or less peaceful revolutions in countries such as Egypt, Tunisia or Yemen during the “Arab spring”, Syria has been torn into a very bloody and violent civil war between the rebels (Free Syrian Army) and the Al-Assad regime. Since the beginning of the uprising against the Baath Party government headed by the current president Bashar Al-Assad began in March 2011, the estimated conflict-related deaths have surpassed the 60,000¹ people (**see figure 1.1**) although the United Nations estimate the real death toll to be much higher. The government has now mostly been driven from large areas in the north and east of Syria; however the Assad regime is focused on maintaining a grip on the key axis from Damascus to Homs, and on the

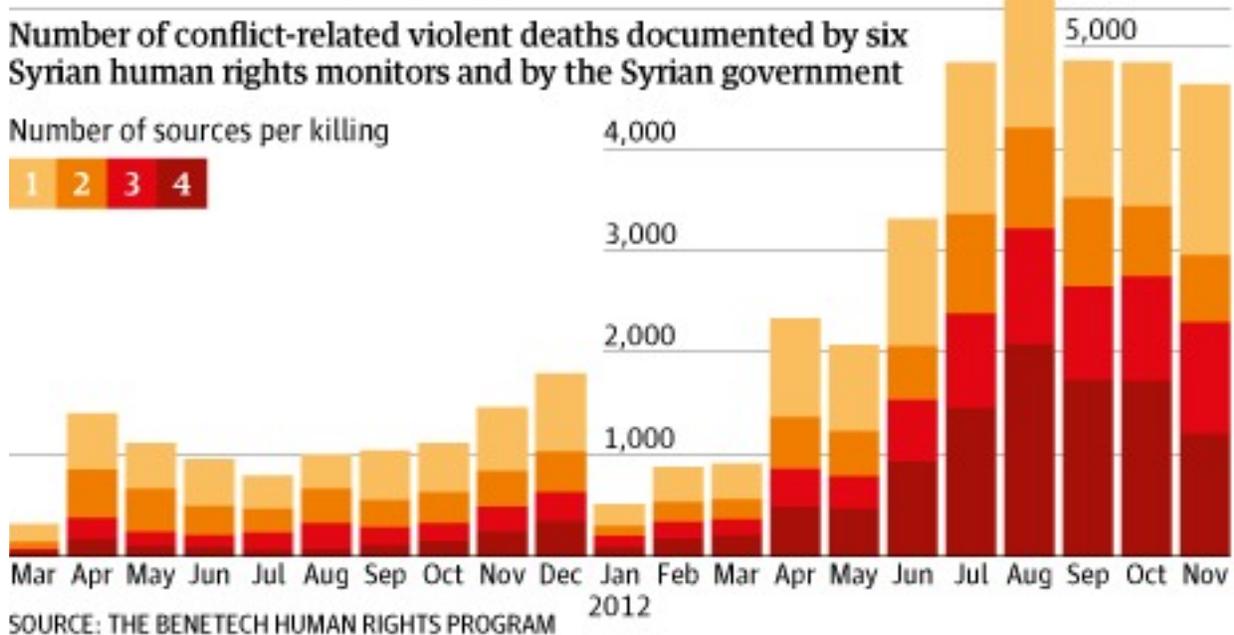
¹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/jan/02/60000-killed-syrian-war-un>

coastal Alawite governorates. Meanwhile, a separate dynamic is seen in the Al-Hasakeh governorate, where the Kurdish Popular Protection Units – who have agreed a truce with the Free Syrian Army – clash with the, mostly foreign-recruited militia of the Al-Nusra Front. The possible deployment of chemical weapons currently held by the regime serves to highlight the evolving complexities of this conflict. A large proportion of the country’s infrastructure, such as water facilities, hospitals, schools and houses have been severely damaged or destroyed. The ability of the population to escape violence is restricted by heavy fighting and checkpoints.

The International Security Commission has been very restricted in their involvement in this issue so far. All three resolutions trying to solve this issue have been vetoed by the Chinese and Russian delegations. Because of this, no notable course of action has been planned or put in place to stop the conflict.

Figure 1: ²

Documented killings in Syria



Definition of key elements

Basher Al-Assad:

Bashar Al-Assad assumed office as president of the Syrian Arab Republic in 2000 after the death of his father, Hafez Al-Assad. The international community has accused the Al-

² http://static.guim.co.uk/sys-images/Guardian/Pix/maps_and_graphs/2013/1/2/1357147571940/Syria-killings-004.png

Assad regime of widespread corruption as well as breaching the fundamental human rights charter. Assad has developed close ties with Russia by purchasing military equipment, as well providing of oil for Russia.

Arab spring:

The Arab spring is a term given to the Arab revolts in the spring of 2011. These revolutions were caused by a build-up of many factors such as poverty and governmental suppressions. It is commonly agreed that the revolts were sparked by the self-immolation of a Tunisian citizen in protest of the fore mentioned factors. The “revolutionary fever” spread to neighbouring countries a while after in which the living conditions were similar to those in Tunisia.

Baath Party:

The Baath party is regarded as a nationalist/socialist party which has a far reaching influence throughout the Arab world. It currently holds 135 of 250 seats in the parliament and so effectively controls it. It was founded in 1966 by Al-Assad’s father- Hafez Al-Assad.

Human rights:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a declaration adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948. The Declaration arose directly from the experience of the Second World War and represents the first global expression of rights to which all human beings are inherently entitled.³ The individual articles can be found on the United Nations website.⁴

Background information

Overview:

Revolts in Syria started around January 2011 under the Arab spring movement which was taking place over much of North Africa as well as some of the Arab states. The Syrian people demanded that President Bashar Al-Assad’s regime respect their fundamental human rights as well as put in place a more democratic system. These protests started off as marches as well as hunger strikes with some cases of more violent forms of protest. Unlike other countries such as Tunisia which set up negotiation which ended in success, Assad took the military route by violently suppressing the Syrian citizens who were protesting using means such as snipers, tanks as well as air strikes to quench the rebellion who all had the “green light” to open fire on even unarmed protesters. Having urged for a smooth transition in Syria, the international community strongly condemned the steps taken by the Syrian government. As of then,

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_Declaration_of_Human_Rights

⁴ <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>

there has been a non-stop escalation in the conflict, with the rebels getting better access to military equipment. This led to the formation of the Syrian National Council (SNC- a coalition of different opposition groups and factions to the Assad regime) as well as the Free Syrian Army (FSA). After immense pressure from the international community and the United Nations, the Syrian government agreed to try and reach a consensus with the Syrian National Council, as well as to make structural reforms within the Syrian state. However, the dialogue remained failed and led to nothing but an increase in violence on both sides. After being suspended by the Arab league, the Security Council supported Kofi Annan, the joint UN-Arab league envoy. He managed to get the Syrian government to agree to a ceasefire, to allow humanitarian aid to refugees and citizens and to start the implementation of a peaceful transfer of power in Syria. This allowed the deployment of UN observers and therefore enabled the international community to receive a reliable report on the situation in Syria. The observers confirmed the killing of hundreds of people however the government accused the rebels (which it labeled as terrorists) and the rebels reciprocally blamed the government for the deaths. However this mission was abruptly ended soon after as violence emerged again. Tensions between Turkey and Syria increased when a Turkish fighter jet was shot down into Syrian waters. The Syrian government later apologized for this accident. However not soon after the death of a few Turkish citizens were reported when shells coming from Syria detonated in a border town. Both the Government and the rebels deny any implication in this event. The number of refugees has increased dramatically over the last couple of months; many Syrian citizens are forced to leave their homes due to war and therefore go and seek for a safer place in Turkey. Both rebel units of the Free Syrian Army and loyalist government troops have strongly violated international law by killing hostages as acts of revenge. President Bashar Al-Assad has stated that he has no intentions to surrender or leave Syria. Every attempt of the Security Council to impose economic sanctions on the regime has failed due to China and Russia's veto. However the Syrian conflict took a new turn of events when rumors that Bashar-Al-Assad's regime was producing Sarin gas- a deadly neurotoxin. This raised the question of whether or not the government would use the large amounts of chemical weapons stockpiled around the country as a potential last resort measure, even though the government stated that they would not use them in such a way. Syria is now in a tight position where the rebels are slowly gaining ground, and any use of chemical warfare would result in its loss of both of its P5 allies- Russia and China. President Barack Obama also stated that there would be "serious consequences" if Assad's regime were to use such weapons. Many countries stated their concern on different plausible scenarios such as these weapons falling in terrorist hands or the rebels using them as a negotiating token with Israel in the event of their victory.

Origins to the conflict:

The situation in Syria is worsening every month and the government has showed no sign of willingness to compromise with the Syrian National Council, and is continuing its military operations. The Syrian civil war is a culmination of factors with one major element: the political domination under which the Syrian people have been living under for many decades. The Baath party has had a large influence on the decision-making process resulting in the Syrian people having very limited possibilities to use their rights.

Extreme poverty, corruption and poor judicial system along with very few reforms that were implemented have caused a highly strung situation. The few reforms that Assad had suggested and 'implemented' were never actually ratified and put into force. It is said that he was willing to grant amnesty to revolutionaries, but in practice, thousands people were sentenced to detention and many other executed. Assad's white card policy to the secret services means that executions, tortures and abductions are not uncommon.

The reasons why there have been no interventions:

Many people wonder why there have been no interventions so far in Syria, given the dead toll mentioned above and the atrocities committed against the Syrian people. This is because a foreign intervention needs the approval of the Security Council and because of Russia and China systematic vetoes; this prevents any course of action from the United Nations. The only other possible action would have been a US lead military intervention. However they have stated that they wouldn't intervene in Syria on their own, as they did in Iraq because an operation of this magnitude would result in billions of dollars spent on armament, supplies and strategic approaches to the conflict as well as a high probable loss of life. However the US is open to a joint intervention, consisting of several NATO member forces. If the USA were to intervene in Syria they would follow a similar approach to that of the Libyan conflict. Without a green light from the Security Council or the willingness from the USA for conduct an intervention on their own, a deployment of troops in Syria to fight against President Assad is highly unlikely.

Major Countries and Organizations involved

Russian Federation:

Syria has always been a close ally to Russia and because of the good relation; Russia declared that it is not going to tolerate any foreign military activity in the country. This explains their vote against all UN resolution condemning Syria as well as their refusal towards a no-fly-zone in Syria as Russia, which it regarded as 'supporting only one side in the civil war'. Furthermore, the Russian government also sees a possible threat for peace and stability in the entire region, due to Islamic extremism which they fear could lead to a state based on religious extremism if the rebels were to take over. However Russia's position would likely change if Syria were to use chemical weapons.

People's Republic of China:

China has objected the proposed sanctions of the Security Council, as they believe that a "fair, peaceful and appropriate" resolution is needed in order to first create a cease-fire and then move on with establishing plans for political settlement, transition and international humanitarian aid. Their position just like Russia's would likely change if Syria were to use chemical weapons.

United States of America:

The United States of America have stated their acceptance and support of Syrian opposition groups. Nonetheless, the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has noted no intervention is being planned and it seems as if the international community is waiting for a decision within the UN, hoping for more space to proceed with actions. According to the State Department, the U.S. government has guaranteed 25 million dollars for "non-lethal" assistance to the Syrian opposition. This sum is mostly meant for communications equipment, such as encrypted radios and satellite-TV channels. More recently major governmental organizations such as the CIA wished to supply weapons to the rebels; however President Barack Obama scraped this initiative. The US also threatened Syria that their possible use of chemical weapons would have "serious consequences". They also expressed their concern about the possible loss of control of the chemical weapons stockpile which could possibly end up in the wrong hands.

Turkey:

Turkey has expressed its concern in the conflict going on near its borders. Tensions have been rising since Syria shot down a Turkish jet, as well as killed 5 civilians by mortar fire. Turkey has received the help of NATO in the form of anti-missile systems, in case of a spill in violence over the border, or the deployment of chemical weapons. On 10 October 2012, a Syrian Air Airbus A320 from Moscow to Damascus was forced by F-16s of the Turkish Air Force to land in Turkey, since Turkish authorities were suspecting it carried Russian-made weapons for the Assad regime; inspectors confiscated objects "thought to be missile parts" and military communications. As a counter reaction, Syria banned Turkish civilian flights from its airspace and accused the Turkish government of "air piracy"

United Kingdom:

The United Kingdom has been one of the most supportive nations for a foreign intervention in the Security Council and has put forward resolutions demanding actions and sanctions to be taken against the Syrian government. Given that these were vetoed and thus not passed, the United Kingdom has said to increase aid to the Syrian opposition, as long as this would exclude lethal aid.

Free Syrian Army:

The main armed opposition of the uprising, the Free Syrian Army (FSA), which allegiance is with the Syrian National Council, is composed of mainly defected Syrian troops. However, as in Libya, many civilians support the FSA by fighting next to trained soldiers. Over the last couple of months, videos have appeared in which cruel actions by soldiers of the FSA can be seen such as the massacre of many captured Syrian loyalist soldiers. The commander in chief, Colonel Riad Al-Assad, has stated that the only goal is the removal of President Assad, not any political involvement.

Syrian Arab Republic:

Led by President Bashar Al-Assad, and the Baath party which many consider to be a form of a dictatorship seeing as no other party has any real power. They have been violently suppressing the protests and revolts all around the country using snipers who were authorized to fire into the crowds, or air strikes to cripple hundreds of protesters at

a time. The international scene has strongly condemned all of its actions; however it is unable to act due to Russia's and China's systematic veto on the subject. The government considers all the protesters and rebels as "terrorist" and allocates nearly all the deaths since the uprising to be caused by the rebels. They also proclaim that the international scene has no right to intervene as the uprisings are within their borders and the UN would be infringing their sovereignty as these are internal matters.

Timeline of events⁵

March 2011

Protests in the capital city of Damascus called for the release of political prisoners. Concurrently, demonstrations in the southern city of Dara'a lead to civilian casualties by the hands of security forces. Assad dismisses his government, releases political prisoners, and lifts a nearly 50-year-old state of emergency. In a speech delivered at the end of the month he blames foreign entities for the unrest and orders crackdowns on demonstrators.

April 2011

The United States and the European Union condemn the crackdowns and impose strict sanctions on the Syrian government. Members of the Syrian ruling party quit amid continued violence. Demonstrators are shot at and tear gassed.

May 2011

Hostility continues and sanctions are tightened; 13 Syrian officials are added to the sanctions list in an executive order from President Obama. Assad rejects a peace plan backed by the Arab League and refuses to step down.

June 2011

The Syrian government says "armed gangs" have killed over 100 members of the security force in the northern town of Jisr Al-Shugur. Troops capture the town and more than 12,000 people flee to Turkey. Assad makes a speech that hints at changing the constitution and perhaps ending the ruling Ba'ath party's control. The military continues to battle protestors across the country.

July 2011

⁵ <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/2012/08/syria-timeline.html>

The opposition organizes under the name Free Syrian Army and calls for members of the Syrian army to defect and join the resistance. In Hama, the fourth largest city in Syria, military tanks open fire on civilians garnering condemnation from across the globe.

August 2011

The Obama administration calls for Assad to step down.

September 2011

As violence continues to spread, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon condemns the actions of the Syrian government. The EU imposes an embargo on oil imports from Syria.

October 2011

China and Russia support the Assad regime and veto a U.N. resolution that condemns the actions of the Syrian government. Both countries are hoping the conflict will resolve itself internally and they can maintain their relationships in the Middle East.

November 2011

The Arab League agrees to impose economic sanctions on Syria and votes to remove them from the League. This brings about a new bout of attacks by both the government and the opposition.

December 2011

The regime allows observers of the Arab League into the country in accordance with the leagues' peace plan to monitor the situation but they leave after a month for security reasons. Two suicide bombs aimed at security service buildings kill 44 people in Damascus. Similar attacks carry on in the capital and continue into next year.

January 2012

The Arab League comes to the U.N. Security Council to propose a diplomatic resolution that is later vetoed by Russia and China. Russian and Chinese officials defend their decision.

February 2012

The U.S. Embassy in Damascus is closed over security concerns and American diplomats are evacuated. The peace plan backed by former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan is put in place. This is the biggest diplomatic attempt to stop the violence and China and Russia support it. It ultimately fails as the assaults continue.

March 2012

Annan travels to Damascus to meet with Assad. There are doubts that the peace plan will yield results as Assad has agreed to other proposals in the past and never followed through with them.

May 2012

Fighting in Homs province leaves more than 100 people dead, including women and children, marking one of the bloodiest days of the uprising so far.

June 2012

As violent clashes persist, the United Nations suspends its observer mission. Rumours of bloody massacres crop up and the diplomatic process remains at a stalemate.

July 2012

Assad's regime begins to splinter as more officials defect or are killed by rebel fighters. As opposition forces grow stronger and intensify. Violence claims more lives. Amid media reports that chemical weapons are being moved out of storage to major cities, the Assad regime says although it has chemical weapons, it won't use them on civilians. The government and rebels are locked in a battle over the city of Aleppo. Residents flow from the city, contributing to a refugee crisis.

August 2012

Kofi Annan steps down as special envoy to Syria, and U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon accepts his resignation. "Tragically, the spiral of violence in Syria is continuing," Ban says. News agencies reported President Obama signed an order earlier this year allowing CIA and other support for the Syrian opposition. The White House did not confirm the reports. US President Obama warns that use of chemical weapons would tilt the US towards intervention.

November 2012

November 2012 Opposition forces (including the Syrian National Council) unite as National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces during a meeting in Doha. France recognizes the Coalition as the only legitimate representative of the Syrian people. Estimated of people has risen to 2.5 million, according to a spokesman of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent.

December 2012

President Barack Obama warns Syria about the use of chemical weapons again refers to it as crossing the "red line". NATO approves Patriots (vehicles equipped with small missiles to intercept and destroy any missile before they can deliver their payload). Russia states that Syria is doing everything it can to safeguard its chemical weapons supplies.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

The Security Council literally paralyzed regarding the question of Syria, given the division between its P5 Member States. While the United States, United Kingdom and France support further sanctions on the regime and consider even a military intervention, China and Russia oppose these actions. Nevertheless, the Security Council has condemned Syria's attack on Turkey and demanded "that such violations" of international law "stop immediately and are not repeated", according to the council president Gert Rosenthal. Further, Syria has been suspended from the Arab League after it failed to end the bloodshed of many civilians and conduct a dialogue with pro-democracy movements. As well, the Arab League imposed sanctions on Syria, which further pressure on Bashar Al-Assad's regime. Finally, the United Nations send former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan as special envoy to Syria. Kofi Annan launched a six-point peace plan for Syria, which contents were (abridged version):

(1) *Commit to work with the Envoy in an inclusive Syrian-led political process to address the legitimate aspirations and concerns of the Syrian people [...]*

(2) *Commit to stop the fighting and achieve [...] cessation of armed violence [...] to protect civilians and stabilize the country. To this end, the Syrian government should immediately cease troop movements towards, and end the use of heavy weapons in, population centers, and begin pullback of military concentrations in and around population centers.*

(3) *Ensure timely provision of humanitarian assistance to all areas affected by the fighting [...]*

(4) *intensify the pace and scale of release of arbitrarily detained persons, including especially vulnerable categories of persons, and persons involved in peaceful political activities [...]*

(5) *ensure freedom of movement throughout the country for journalists and a non-discriminatory visa policy for them;*

(6) *Respect freedom of association and the right to demonstrate peacefully as legally guaranteed.*

Given the increasing violence, the six-point peace plan failed and Kofi Annan was replaced by Lakhdar Brahimi on 17 August 2012.

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