



Security Council Topic Background Guide  
***Topic 1: The Situation in the Syrian Arab Republic<sup>1</sup>***

14 October 2013

In Spring 2011, when the popular uprisings of the “Arab Spring” began across the Middle-East, protests began in a number of Syrian cities calling for President Bashar Assad to resign and for an end to authoritarian rule. In response, the Syrian government used military force against protesters and granted some symbolic concessions.

In the two and a half years since the protests began, the protesters have armed and carried out attacks against the government and government supporters, and the situation has degenerated into a civil war. More than 100,000 Syrians, including both combatants and civilians, have died,<sup>2</sup> and more than one-third of the population has been displaced, either internally in Syria or to neighboring countries. In addition, according to the UN Human Rights Council and other human rights organizations, both the Syrian government and rebel groups have committed human rights violations.<sup>3</sup>

The events in Syria have affected other UN member states. Shelling from Syria has occurred over the borders of both Turkey and Israel,<sup>4</sup> and Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, and Egypt have received large numbers of refugees. The Syrian civil war has also affected international relations beyond the Middle East. Tension worldwide was high in September, when the US threatened to strike Syrian military bases in retaliation for chemical weapons attacks on civilians. The US stepped down only when it and Russia came to an agreement, later endorsed by the Security Council, for international inspectors to identify and destroy all chemical weapons in Syria. If Syria fails to comply, the US has said it has the right to attack. But the Security Council resolution did not authorize enforcement measures.<sup>5</sup>

According to the United Nations Charter, the Security Council has the primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security.<sup>6</sup> But until the Council passed the recent resolution authorizing chemical disarmament, it was unable to pass any significant resolution related to the conflict. Even then, the Council took no position on whether the government or the rebels are primarily at fault and, beyond calling for peace talks, said little about what can and should be done to bring the war to an end. What can the Security Council do to address these shortcomings in its position on Syria so Syrians can return to their homes and life in the region and in the international community can return to greater peace and security?

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<sup>1</sup> This background guide was written by Karen Ruth Adams, Montana Model UN faculty advisor, and Nicholas Potratz, 2013 research assistant. Copyright 2013 by Karen Ruth Adams.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Cowell, “War Deaths in Syria Said to Top 100,000,” *New York Times*, 26 June 2013, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/27/world/middleeast/syria.html>

<sup>3</sup> “Document - Syria: No Respite for the Millions Displaced by the Conflict” Amnesty International, 20 June 2013, available at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/031/2013/en>.

<sup>4</sup> “How Syria conflict affects its neighbours,” BBC News, 9 June 2013, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-22815222>

<sup>5</sup> Rick Gladstone and Somini Sengupta, “Swift Movement Is Seen on Syria After U.N. Action,” *New York Times*, 27 September 2013; [newspaper online]; available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/28/world/middleeast/syria-chemical-weapons.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/28/world/middleeast/syria-chemical-weapons.html?_r=0)

<sup>6</sup> United Nations, “Charter of the United Nations,” June 26, 1945, Chapter V, Article 24, available at <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/>.

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## *History and Current Events*

To understand the current situation in Syria and determine how the Security Council should respond, it is important to understand the history of Syria, the origins of the civil war, and the way that human, regional, and international security have been affected by the war in general and by the use of chemical weapons in particular.

### A Short History of Syria

The lands of modern Syria were part of the Mesopotamian “Fertile Crescent,” where the world’s earliest cities developed about 4000 BC. Until about 1850 BC, Mesopotamia was divided into two countries – Sumer in the southeast (in contemporary Iraq) and Akkad in the northwest (contemporary Syria). By 1900 BC, both were conquered by the Amorites, who governed the regions as Babylonia and developed science and law, including the Hammurabic Code.<sup>7</sup>

Assyria broke away from Babylon in about 1100 BC, establishing an empire of its own. From the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, the Assyrian empire flourished and at times stretched from Egypt through contemporary Israel, Lebanon, Syria, southern Turkey, and Iraq to the Persian Gulf, uniting most of the Middle East.<sup>8</sup>

Syria’s ancient roots have been traced through excavations at sites throughout the country, including the Tall Mardikh palace near the city of Aleppo, where archeologists found “more than 17,000 inscribed clay tablets, dated to about 2600–2500.”<sup>9</sup> Aleppo is contemporary Syria’s largest city and has been the site of much rebel resistance. Since 2011, it has been repeatedly bombed by the Syrian government, reducing “entire areas to rubble.”<sup>10</sup>

After the fall of Assyria, Syria was ruled by various empires, including the Persian, Macedonian, Greek, Armenian, Roman, and Byzantine. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD, the Syrian city of Damascus surrendered to Arab Muslim forces extending Islam and a centralized Islamic state known as the Caliphate.<sup>11</sup> As time went on, the system fragmented into competing caliphs, sultans, and other rulers with different territories, ideologies, and governments. Christians and Jews continued to live in the area and, over time and in different places, were treated with varying degrees of hostility and tolerance.<sup>12</sup>

During the Crusades (1095-1291), Western Europeans invaded parts of Syria and its neighbors and established a series of small Christian states. After their defeat by local rulers who united Syria and Egypt, the area flourished until 1491, when it was sacked by the Mongols.<sup>13</sup> Later Syria was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire based in contemporary Turkey. When Ottoman power began to wane and Egypt invaded and occupied Damascus, Europeans once again became involved, with the British supporting the Ottomans and the French siding with the

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<sup>7</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, “Babylonia,” accessed online on 10 October 2013 at <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/47586/Babylonia>.

<sup>8</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, “Assyria,” accessed online on 10 October 2013 at <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/39555/Assyria>.

<sup>9</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, “Syria: Early History,” accessed online on 10 October 2013 at <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/578856/Syria/29902/Early-history>.

<sup>10</sup> Liam Stack, “Satellite Images Show Destruction in Aleppo,” *New York Times*, 7 August 2013, <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/08/07/satellite-images-show-destruction-in-aleppo/>

<sup>11</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, “Syria: Hellenistic and Roman Periods,” accessed online on 10 October 2013 at <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/578856/Syria/29903/Hellenistic-and-Roman-periods>.

<sup>12</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, “Syria: The Umayyds,” accessed online on 10 October 2013 at <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/578856/Syria/29910/The-Umayyads>.

<sup>13</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, “Syria: The-Ayyubids-and-Mamluks,” accessed online on 10 October 2013 at <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/578856/Syria/29913/The-Ayyubids-and-Mamluks>.

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Egyptians.<sup>14</sup> At the end of World War I, control of Syria passed from the Ottoman Empire to France. From 1920 to 1946, France administered Syria as a League of Nations mandate (essentially a colony).<sup>15</sup>

After independence, the Syrian government was plagued by instability until Hafez al-Assad established the current government during a 1971 military coup. When Hafez died in 2000, the presidency passed to his son, Bashar, the current president. Although the majority (74%) of the country's population is Sunni Muslim, Bashar al-Assad has continued his father's policy of filling Syria's top government and military positions with family members and people from the minority Alawite (Shiite Muslim) religious community.<sup>16</sup> As a result, much of the opposition to the government is from Sunni Muslims and their Saudi and Gulf supporters. By contrast, much of the support for the government is from Shiite Alawites and their Iranian supporters. In addition, Russia has been a longtime supporter of the regime.

### Origins of the Civil War

Inspired by 2011 anti-government protests in Tunisia and Egypt, Syrian protests first began in the city of Deraa and quickly spread to other cities. Protesters called for Bashar al-Assad to step down after four decades of family rule and for civil rights, such as freedom of speech.<sup>17</sup> By June 2011, as many as 100,000 Syrians had participated in protests, and 1,500 had been killed by government forces.<sup>18</sup>

In response to the regime's crackdown, numerous opposition groups, including defectors from the Syrian military, gradually took up arms against the regime. Most of the military, however, continued to support Assad. By fall 2011, the fighting between opposition groups and the government's military forces had escalated to full civil war, with large numbers of combatants on each side.<sup>19</sup>

As of June 2013, the death toll in Syria exceeded 100,000. Of those, about 43,000 were government soldiers and pro-government fighters killed by rebels, about 14,000 were rebel forces killed by the Syrian military and its supporters, and about 37,000 were civilians (including about 8,000 women and children) killed by both government and rebel forces. According to the United Nations, these are conservative estimates. Some tallies place the death toll above 200,000.<sup>20</sup>

The biggest question facing the Security Council is how to stop the fighting. Initially, it was thought the war might end with the death or deposition of Bashar al-Assad and the establishment of a democratic government. Two years later, it appears that the Syrian government is strong enough to hold onto much of its territory. Even if that were not the case, it is unlikely the fighting would end if the government changed. There is no single opposition movement ready to take the government's place. Instead, there are approximately 1,200 rebel groups, each with a local power base and a unique agenda. Moreover, there is a growing divide between rebels who seek democratic

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<sup>14</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, "Syria: Decline of Ottoman Authority," accessed online on 10 October 2013 at <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/578856/Syria/29916/Decline-of-Ottoman-authority>.

<sup>15</sup> "Iraq," CIA World Factbook, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>

<sup>16</sup> The World Factbook, "Syria," US Central Intelligence Agency, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html>, accessed 19 August 2013.

<sup>17</sup> "Holding the Fort," *Economist*, 31 March 2011, available at <http://www.economist.com/node/18488544>

<sup>18</sup> "The Squeeze on Assad," *Economist*, 30 June 2011, available at <http://www.economist.com/node/18895586>

<sup>19</sup> David Jolly, "Death Toll in Syrian Civil War Near 93,000, U.N. Says," *New York Times*, 13 June 2013, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/14/world/middleeast/un-syria-death-toll.html>

<sup>20</sup> Cowell, "War Deaths in Syria."

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reforms and those who wish to establish a fundamentalist Islamic state.<sup>21</sup> According to David R. Shedd, the deputy director of the US Defense Intelligence Agency, this means the conflict could last for many years, regardless of which group technically “succeeds.”<sup>22</sup>

### Human Rights and Human Security in Syria

When violence initially erupted, it was by the Syrian government against unarmed civilian protesters. Thus, most accusations of human rights abuses were against the Assad regime. As the conflict has continued, however, human rights abuses from both the government and opposition forces have become apparent. According to Human Rights Watch:

Syria responded to months of peaceful protests with brutal force involving indiscriminate air and artillery assaults on residential areas and apparent targeting of civilians, and torture, which constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, pushing the political confrontation into an internal armed conflict. The opposition is increasingly conducting offensive operations. Some opposition forces have carried out serious abuses like kidnapping, torture, and what appear to be extrajudicial executions.<sup>23</sup>

In 2013, Human Rights Watch observers found 59 instances in 52 cities in which the Syrian government explicitly attacked civilians. In many cases, these attacks, including airstrikes and bombings, targeted civilians waiting in line to receive bread from bakeries, or care from civilian medical facilities.<sup>24</sup>

Human rights organizations and the United Nations have also voiced concern over the inaccessibility of Syria to humanitarian workers and the paucity of routes for civilians to leave war zones. This problem exacerbates human security issues in the region, as people do not have access to necessities like food, water, energy, and medical assistance. Human Rights Watch reports that 70,000 people lack these basic necessities; fighting in the city of Homs has trapped and endangered up to 4,000 people alone.<sup>25</sup> According to the UN, 6.8 million Syrians need some form of humanitarian assistance.<sup>26</sup> Under the Geneva Conventions (which applies to intrastate conflicts and which Syria has ratified) and customary International Human Rights law, combatants must protect the lives of civilians and must give civilians the opportunity to leave any territory experiencing armed conflict.<sup>27</sup>

In June 2013, Amnesty International reported that there were approximately 4.25 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Syria. Many IDPs ventured to leave the country, only to find that states like Turkey had closed their borders. As a result, IDPs have undergone continued attacks, often have to live in makeshift camps under poor conditions, and still have no access to humanitarian assistance. In one IDP camp:

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<sup>21</sup> Ben Hubbard and Michael R. Gordon, “Key Syrian Rebel Groups Abandon Exile Leaders,” *New York Times*, 25 September 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/26/world/middleeast/syria-crisis.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Eric Schmitt and Mark Mazzetti, “U.S. Intelligence Official Says Syrian War could Last for Years,” *New York Times*, 20 June 2013, available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/21/world/middleeast/us-intelligence-official-says-syrian-war-could-last-for-years.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/21/world/middleeast/us-intelligence-official-says-syrian-war-could-last-for-years.html?_r=0)

<sup>23</sup> “Human Rights in Syria,” Human Rights Watch, available at <http://www.hrw.org/middle-eastn-africa/syria>, accessed 18 August 2013.

<sup>24</sup> “Syria air strikes 'target civilians' - Human Rights Watch,” BBC News, 10 April 2013, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-22098794>.

<sup>25</sup> “Syria: Security Council Should Demand Humanitarian Access,” Human Rights Watch, 15 July 2013, available at <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/07/15/syria-security-council-should-demand-humanitarian-access>.

<sup>26</sup> UN News Centre, “Syria: Ban and Special Representative welcome US-Russia accord to spur political solution,” United Nations, 8 May 2013, available at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=44853#.UhpHCD8cCHs>

<sup>27</sup> Geneva Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (12 August 1949), available at <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/INTRO/380>. See also: “Syria: Security Council Should Demand Humanitarian Access,” Human Rights Watch.

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Heavy rain leaked into the tents and had turned the clay soil into thick slippery mud, raw sewage flowed between the tents. The food being distributed was insufficient and of very poor quality and large numbers of people complained of medical conditions for which they were receiving no treatment.<sup>28</sup>

Even when Syrians find shelter outside of camps in abandoned structures like schools, people have a paucity of food, water, sanitation, and medical services. Organization like Amnesty International have requested that states take action to assist IDPs, not only via humanitarian assistance, but also through ensuring that IDPs can escape the Syrian conflict by crossing borders.<sup>29</sup>

### Relations with and Effects on Neighboring States

The conflict in Syria not only affects the Syrian people. It also affects nearby states. In addition to IDPs within Syria, about 2 million Syrians have sought refuge in surrounding states (for a total of more than 6 million displaced Syrians), including more than 684,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon, 516,000 in Jordan, 434,000 in Turkey, 154,000 in Iraq, and 107,000 in Egypt.<sup>30</sup> This places strains on the states providing refuge in a number of ways. Refugees escaping war cause “natural resource depletion, irreversible impacts on natural resources, impacts on health, impacts on social conditions, impacts on the economy, and social impacts on local populations.”<sup>31</sup> Often states must divert resources to refugees, putting pressure on social programs.<sup>32</sup> For instance, in Jordan the “environmental sanitation situation has worsened due to the increased volume of waste” from refugees.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to providing a haven for a large number of Syrian refugees, Turkey has supported the opposition movement by allowing rebel bases on Turkish territory. This has inflamed Turkish relations with Syria, a former ally. In retaliation, Syria has shelled Turkish territory, killing five civilians as of June 2013.<sup>34</sup>

As a result of the approximately half-million Syrian refugees that have entered Jordan since the conflict in Syria began, Jordan has now closed its borders to refugees. Jordan has explained this with reference to the difficulty of providing food, water, and other resources and assistance to refugees, and its concern that the large number of refugees could spur civil unrest. In August 2013, Jordan asked the United States to provide surveillance and other equipment to secure the border from arms smugglers. It has also asked for humanitarian assistance meet the needs of refugees.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> “Document - Syria: No Respite for the Millions,” Amnesty International.

<sup>29</sup> “Document - Syria: No Respite for the Millions,” Amnesty International.

<sup>30</sup> UN News Centre, “Thousands of Syrians stream into northern Iraq via new bridge, reports UN agency,” United Nations, 16 August 2013, available at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=45638&Cr=syria&Cr1=refugee#.UhJscz8cCHs>

<sup>31</sup> Ken Conca and Jennifer Wallace, “Environment and Peacebuilding in War-torn Societies: Lessons from the UN Environment Programme’s Experience with Postconflict Assessment,” *Global Governance*, 15(2009), p. 490.

<sup>32</sup> Brianna Kielar, Jessica Yellin, and Tom Cohen, “Obama to Move Forward with Plan to Arm Syrian Rebels,” CNN, 24 July 2013, available at <http://www.cnn.com/2013/07/23/politics/us-syrian-rebels>

<sup>33</sup> Oxfam, “Integrated Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Host Communities,” ReliefWeb [OCHA], 31 March 2013, available at <http://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/integrated-assessment-syrian-refugees-host-communities-march-2013>.

<sup>34</sup> “How Syria conflict affects its neighbours,” BBC News.

<sup>35</sup> Thom Shanker, “Jordan Asks for Help in Securing Syrian Border,” *New York Times*, 14 August 2013; [newspaper online]; available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/15/world/middleeast/jordan-asks-for-help-in-securing-border-with-syria.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/15/world/middleeast/jordan-asks-for-help-in-securing-border-with-syria.html?_r=0)

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The conflict in Syria also poses a serious threat to the stability of Iraq, where the minority Sunni population accuses the majority Shiite government of discrimination.<sup>36</sup> Some of the Sunni militias currently operating in Syria have roots in and connections with the al-Qaeda affiliated Sunni insurgents who fought the US and coalition forces in Iraq from the US invasion in 2003 until the US departure in 2011. As their strength in Syria has grown, they have regrouped in Iraq. According to the US Department of State, the average number of Iraqis killed by terrorist attacks in 2011 and 2012 was about five. By contrast, terrorist attacks killed at least 30 people during the summer of 2013 alone.<sup>37</sup>

According to the BBC, the Syrian conflict has had the most detrimental effect on the political stability of Lebanon. Hezbollah, a Shiite militia and political party with seats in the Lebanese government, depends on Assad for weapons to confront Israel and maintain political support. As a result, the group has assisted Assad in his fight against the rebels. This has angered Lebanese Sunni groups, which back the Syrian uprising and who have begun to fight Lebanese Alawites and supporters of Assad in some Lebanese cities.<sup>38</sup>

Although Israel and Syria have technically been at war since 1948, the Syrian-Israeli border was quiescent from the countries' last real fight in 1973 until the Syrian civil war began in 2011. When shells and gunfire from the Syrian conflict permeated the border near the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, Israel returned fire. Israel has expressed concern that Hezbollah and Al-Qaeda affiliates will obtain advanced weaponry from the Syrian conflict and use it against Israel. To limit this possibility, Israel has used airstrikes to attack military convoys in Syria. In response, Syria has accused Israel of supporting rebel groups and has threatened to strike at Israel if it takes further action.<sup>39</sup>

### International Responses to the War and Chemical Weapons Use

Shortly after the Syrian protests began, a number of regional organizations took stances against Bashar al-Assad. Most recognizably, the Arab League (of which Syria was a founding member) encouraged Assad to step down and hold peaceful elections and imposed economic sanctions to encourage him to do so. The European Union also imposed an oil embargo, which has severely reduced Syria's economic output.<sup>40</sup>

A number of states in and beyond the region have become involved in the conflict. For example, Iran and Russia provide military assistance to the Syrian government, while Saudi Arabia and Qatar provide arms and training to opposition groups.<sup>41</sup> In June 2013, after CIA analyses of the bodies of Syrian civilians and opposition forces revealed traces of chemical weapons, the US announced that it would provide moderate Syrian rebels with small arms and anti-tank equipment.<sup>42</sup> In response, Russia and China have criticized the US for intervening in Syria's internal affairs, in violation of the UN Charter.

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<sup>36</sup> "How Syria conflict affects its neighbours," BBC News.

<sup>37</sup> Michael R. Gordon and Tim Arango, "Syrian War Fueling Attacks by Al Qaeda in Iraq, Officials Say," *New York Times*, 15 August 2013; [newspaper online]; available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/16/world/middleeast/syrian-war-fueling-attacks-by-al-qaeda-in-iraq-officials-say.html?ref=syria&\\_r=1&](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/16/world/middleeast/syrian-war-fueling-attacks-by-al-qaeda-in-iraq-officials-say.html?ref=syria&_r=1&).

<sup>38</sup> "How Syria conflict affects its neighbours," BBC News.

<sup>39</sup> "How Syria conflict affects its neighbours," BBC News.

<sup>40</sup> Liz Sly, "Syria's economy is key to Assad's future," *Washington Post*, 14 November 2011, available at [http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-11-14/world/35281705\\_1\\_assad-regime-damascus-ayham-kamel](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-11-14/world/35281705_1_assad-regime-damascus-ayham-kamel).

<sup>41</sup> Michael R Gordon, "Kerry Announces Saudi Support for Syrian Strike," *New York Times*, 8 September 2013; [newspaper online]; available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/09/world/middleeast/kerry-announces-saudi-support-for-syrian-strike.html?ref=world>

<sup>42</sup> Dan Roberts, "US Says it Will Arm Syrian Rebels after Chemical Weapons Test," *The Guardian*, 13 June 2013, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/13/syria-chemical-weapons-us-confirm>.

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Despite their differences on intervention, the US, Russia, China, and other states worked together in 2012, as the UN supported Group on Syria (also known as the “Friends of Syria”), when they facilitated negotiations in Geneva between the conflicting Syrian parties. In the final Geneva communiqué, the group articulated a strategy for a peaceful negotiated end to the conflict and humanitarian assistance to affected Syrians.<sup>43</sup>

Throughout the conflict, US officials have argued against direct US military involvement in Syria, favoring a peaceful resolution and, if that is not possible, supporting the rebels in their fight against the regime. The US has called on Assad to relinquish his position and has encouraged states to impose sanctions on the Syrian government and to assist moderate opposition groups.<sup>44</sup> In addition, in 2012, US President Barak Obama established a “red line” against the use of chemical weapons,<sup>45</sup> saying that if Syria crossed the line, it would “change his calculations.”<sup>46</sup>

On August 21, 2013, reports emerged that a chemical weapons attack had occurred in Eastern Damascus and surrounding areas. Although some observers state that only about 300 people died, others estimate that more than 1,300 people died and that 3,600 were injured and received treatment. Among those affected or killed by the weapons were noncombatants, including a large number of children. Although Assad has repeatedly denied using chemical weapons and pinned their use on rebel forces, the US has stated that it has strong evidence that the Syrian government has used such weapons.<sup>47</sup>

Shortly after the attacks, the Syrian government agreed to permit UN observers to investigate the use of chemical weapons, as both sides of the conflict have accused each other of using such weapons.<sup>48</sup> UN reports from their investigation give some indication that government forces may have been behind the attacks based on the trajectory and type of missiles used in the attack. Observers from Human Rights Watch note, however, that opposition forces also had possession of sarin, the nerve agent employed in the chemical attack.<sup>49</sup>

In late August 2013, as a response to the attack, the US began considering missile strikes against Syrian government military targets, arguing that it simply sought to take limited action against Syria for crossing the red lines set the previous year. As President Obama continued to seek support for the strike both domestically and internationally, Russia stated that it would accept a proposal to remove chemical weapons from Syria. Shortly thereafter, both Assad and the US agreed to begin working towards eliminating chemical weapons in Syria. On September 27, 2013, the Security Council agreed to a resolution that would work to remove Syria’s chemical weapons by June 2014. As a concession to Russia, however, the resolution does not include immediate consequences for the Syrian government if it fails to fulfill its obligations under the resolution.<sup>50</sup> The only

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<sup>43</sup> United Nations, “Action Group for Syria Final Communique,” 30 June 2012, available at <http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Syria/FinalCommuniqueActionGroupforSyria.pdf>.

<sup>44</sup> Hilary Rodham Clinton, “Remarks Following UNSC Meeting on Syria,” US Department of State website, 31 January 2013, available at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2012/01/182848.htm>.

<sup>45</sup> “U.N. Chemical Weapons Inspectors to Start on Monday,” Reuters, 18 August 2013, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/08/18/us-syria-crisis-chemical-idUSBRE97H05220130818>

<sup>46</sup> Mark Mardell, “Obama’s Thick Red Line on Syria,” BBC News, 22 August 2013, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-23800031>.

<sup>47</sup> “Syria chemical attack: What we know,” BBC News, 24 September 2013, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23927399>.

<sup>48</sup> “U.N. Chemical Weapons Inspectors to Start on Monday,” Reuters.

<sup>49</sup> “Syria chemical attack: What we know,” BBC.

<sup>50</sup> Gladstone and Sengupta, “Swift Movement is Seen on Syria After U.N. Action.”

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significant element of the resolution that does not pertain to chemical weapons was a call for the government and rebels to attend Geneva II peace talks, which have been repeatedly postponed.<sup>51</sup>

### *Previous Committee Work on this Topic*

The United Nations has made numerous attempts to foster a diplomatic solution to the Syrian conflict, particularly by sending several special envoys to speak with the involved parties. The UN initially sent former Secretary-General Kofi Annan in hopes of placating both groups. When Annan stepped down in August 2012, Ban Ki-Moon appointed Lakhdar Brahimi to serve as Joint Special Representative for Syria representing both the United Nations and the Arab League.<sup>52</sup>

UN organizations have also tried to ameliorate the negative humanitarian consequences of the conflict. Today, the UN Food and Agricultural Organization, World Food Programme, UN Children's Fund, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and the UN Population Fund all provide services to Syrians.<sup>53</sup> For instance, UNICEF has distributed food, hygienic supplies, and water, but Syrian government checkpoints have limited the organization's ability to reach people in need.<sup>54</sup>

References to the Syrian conflict from the Security Council generally appear in resolutions titled under the "Middle East" category, instead of referencing the state directly. This reflects the fact that the Council is divided on the question of whether it is appropriate to intervene in Syria's internal affairs. In Security Council Resolution 2043 adopted in 2012, the Security Council established the UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS). This resolution gave UNSMIS the mission of monitoring a ceasefire and ensuring the fulfillment of the Joint Special Envoy's six-point plan. The plan aims to end violence in Syria, use the special envoy as a mediator, respect the rights and aspirations of the Syrian people, ensure the access of humanitarian assistance, and allow free movement of observers, such as journalists. Initially, UNSMIS had a 90-day renewable mandate, but the Security Council stopped renewing it in August 2013 because the use of heavy weapons and the high level of violence made it too dangerous for UN personnel to carry out the task.<sup>55</sup>

From 2011 until September 2013, with the exception of authorizing and de-authorizing UNSMIS, the Security Council was unable to achieve consensus on any measure to address the conflict. In July 2012, China and Russia vetoed a resolution that would have placed sanctions on the Syrian government until violence ended against opposition groups. This was the third instance in which China and Russia vetoed sanctions on the Syrian government. China and Russia have stated that they want to avoid another destabilizing military intervention, as in Iraq and Libya.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Security Council Report, "Syria: From Stalemate to Compromise," 27 September 2013, <http://www.whatsinblue.org/2013/09/syria-adoption-of-a-chemical-weapons-resolution.php>

<sup>52</sup> UN News Centre, "UN, Arab League appoint veteran diplomat to take over Annan's role on Syrian crisis," United Nations, 12 August 2012, available at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=42702#Uko5p4bNU0E>.

<sup>53</sup> UN News Centre, "News Focus: Syria," United Nations, available at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocusRel.asp?infocusID=146&Body=Syria&Body1=>, accessed 4 September 2013.

<sup>54</sup> UN News Centre, "Syria: UN officials urge humanitarian access to thousands trapped by intense fighting," United Nations, 2 August 2013, available at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=45555&Cr=syria&Cr1=#.UhJ0aT8cCHs>

<sup>55</sup> "United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria," United Nations, available at <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unsmis/>, accessed 2 September 2013. Also see: UN Security Council Resolution 2043 (2012), available at [http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=S/RES/2043%20\(2012\)](http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=S/RES/2043%20(2012)).

<sup>56</sup> Rick Gladstone, "Friction at the U.N. as Russia and China Veto Another Resolution on Syria Sanctions," *New York Times*, 19 July 2012; [newspaper online]; available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/20/world/middleeast/russia-and-china-veto-un-sanctions-against-syria.html>.



## Montana Model UN High School Conference

In the face of Security Council inaction, the UN General Assembly passed several resolutions on the issue. In early 2013, the General Assembly adopted the resolution “The Situation in the Syrian Arab Republic,” which condemned the violence and human rights abuses committed by both sides of the fighting and urged Syria to allow humanitarian aid and independent observers into the state to distribute aid, evaluate the situation for human rights abuses, and investigate the alleged use of chemical weapons against civilians.<sup>57</sup> According to Syria and Russia, this resolution gave unbalanced support to the opposition forces in Syria and empowered terrorist organizations within the country. China also opposed the resolution, arguing that was in violation of the UN Charter because it interfered unnecessarily in the internal affairs of Syria. By contrast, the US and members of the Arab League extolled the document as emblematic of the international community’s desire to bring peace to Syria.<sup>58</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

Soon the Syrian civil war will enter its third year. What can the Security Council do to ensure that the violence ends and stability returns to the country so that the war does not spread to neighboring states and further distance UN member states from one another? In researching and writing your country’s position on this issue, consider the following questions:

- What political, military, economic, and cultural relations does your country have with Syria? How might supporting either the Assad regime or the opposition affect your country?
- How has your country been affected by the civil war in Syria and by civil wars in other countries, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya?
- What is your country’s experience with civil war and human rights violations within its own borders? What is its record of involvement in civil and international wars in other countries? What do these experiences suggest about how the Syrian conflict could be resolved?
- From your country’s perspective, which of the following elements of the Syrian conflict are most important: lack of democracy, religious differences, civil war, refugees, regional instability, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction? Should the Security Council attempt to address all of these issues, or should it focus on just some of them?
- Is your country a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention? How did it respond to the use of chemical weapons in Syria, to the US’s threat of force, and to the Security Council resolution on chemical disarmament?
- What can the Security Council do to ensure that Syria complies with its recent resolution on chemical disarmament? If it does not comply, what should the Council do?
- What can and should the Security Council do to ensure that Syrians in particular and people and states worldwide will experience greater peace and security in the coming months, years, and decades?

### ***Recommended Reading***

Amnesty International. “Syria: No respite for the millions displaced by the conflict.” 20 June 2013. Available at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE24/031/2013/en/ca196772-fb7d-43fe-a1a4-4b7e281ed779/mde240312013en.html>.

This article from Amnesty International provides a description of the conditions and events affecting both internally displaced persons in Syria and Syrian refugees in neighboring states.

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<sup>57</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 67/262 (2013), available at [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/67/262](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/67/262).

<sup>58</sup> UN Department of Public Information, “General Assembly Adopts Text Condemning Violence in Syria,” UN General Assembly, 15 May 2013, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2013/ga11372.doc.htm>.

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Eakin, Hugh and Alisa Roth. "Syria's Refugees: The Catastrophe." *New York Review of Books*. 10 October 2013. Available at <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2013/oct/10/syrias-refugees-catastrophe/?page=2>

This recent article describes the situation of Syrian refugees and IDPs, both those who are served by the UNHCR and the many others who are unregistered and receive no UN assistance. It also addresses the security challenges faced by aid workers and neighboring countries, such as Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey.

"How Syria conflict affects its neighbours." BBC News, 9 June 2013. Available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-22815222>.

This page includes an overview of the Syrian conflicts' effects on its neighbors. At the bottom are links to background information, such as how the conflict escalated from protests to its current status and a map detailing the strength of government and opposition groups across Syria.

Security Council Report. "Syria." Available at <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/syria/>

Security Council Report is a research organization affiliated with Columbia University. From this page you can access a wide variety of Security Council documents about Syria, as well as analyses by Security Council Report of developments in Syria. It is a good place to keep up with what is happening in the situation.

"Syria." *New York Times*. Country page. Available at <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/syria/index.html?8qa>

This page provides a summary of recent developments related to Syria.

"Syria chemical attack: What we know." BBC News, 24 September 2013. Available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23927399>.

This article provides an overview of the weapons attack that occurred in August. In particular it provides evidence regarding the attacks from the UN's investigation, the attacks impacts, and photos from the attack.

UN News Centre. "News Focus: Syria," United Nations. Available at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocusRel.asp?infocusID=146&Body=Syria&Body1=>, accessed 4 September 2013.

This page from the UN News Centre provides a number of useful links on the topic of Syria. These include recent UN News Centre articles on the topic, information on the Special Envoy to Syria, and links to UN humanitarian agency operations in Syria, such as UNICEF, the WFP, and the UNHCR.

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Syrian Arab Republic," available at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/countries/MENARegion/Pages/SYIndex.aspx>, accessed 27 August 2013.

This site provides a number of helpful links on understanding the human rights situation in Syria. This includes links to Syria's international human rights commitments, reports on significant human rights concerns in the country, and decisions regarding the human rights situations in Syria, such as resolutions from the General Assembly and Human Rights Council.

"UN Supervision Mission in Syria." United Nations. Available at <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unsmis/>, accessed 2 September 2013.

This site provides information on the UNSMS peacekeeping mission in Syria. It includes information such as the history of the mission, the mandate of the mission, and facts about the mission during its operation.