

STANFORD MODEL UNITED NATIONS  
CONFERENCE 2014

# The Syrian Civil War

## *The Rebels*



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Image Credit: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/16/world/middleeast/turkey-recognizes-new-syrian-rebel-group-as-legitimate-leader-of-syria.html>

## Introduction

Welcome!

My name is Thu-An Pham, and I am currently a sophomore looking to major in International Relations at Stanford. I am very excited to chair the SMUNC 2014 Joint Crisis Committee: The Syrian Civil War—Rebels. In this committee, we will be simulating a convention of the rebel groups within the Syrian opposition movement. The convention is meeting in August 2013 for the purposes of: 1) forming a rebel governing coalition to strategize, coordinate, and direct the activities of the various rebel groups; 2) delineating a clear, unified strategy to defeat Bashar al-Assad's regime. This strategy will be multifold, consisting of plans for solidifying governance of rebel territory, addressing the humanitarian crises, and engaging with other actors in the region and in the world to further the rebel cause. Most importantly, the strategy will entail reaching an armistice or ceasefire with al-Assad's forces and drawing up terms for a permanent agreement to ensure peace and stability in Syria. The convention's other tasks include: drafting a military strategy for countering Assad's forces, drawing up plans to increase rebel control of, and thereby mobilize, their captured territory; strengthening and establish closer ties with regional and global partners in order to further the rebel cause; and managing the expansion of ISIS. In order to advance the struggle to defeat the Assad regime and navigate the complex and constantly shifting landscape of the Middle East, the convention representatives must collaborate and cooperate with one another. However, sharp divisions and differences exist between the various groups represented at the convention. These points of contention include divergent visions of a new Syrian state, sectarian differences, and the form that governance of rebel territory should take.

I look forward to meeting you all soon!

Best,  
Thu-An

### **Educational Topics Covered:**

Students analyze the effects of the First World War.

- Describe the effects of the war and resulting peace treaties on population movement, the international economy, and shifts in the geographic and political borders of Europe and the Middle East.

Students analyze instances of nation-building in the contemporary world in at least two of the following regions or countries: the Middle East, Africa, Mexico and other parts of Latin America, and China.

- Understand the challenges in the regions, including their geopolitical, cultural, military, and economic significance and the international relationships in which they are involved.
- Describe the recent history of the regions, including political divisions and systems, key leaders, religious issues, natural features, resources, and population patterns.
- Discuss the important trends in the regions today and whether they appear to serve the cause of individual freedom and democracy.

Students analyze the integration of countries into the world economy and the information, technological, and communications revolutions (e.g., television, satellites, computers).

## Background Context: The Uprising

***Dar'aa, March 2011***—As the Arab Spring gained momentum, several teenagers spray-painted a school wall in Dar'aa, Syria with the words, “It’s your turn, doctor,” a statement referencing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s training as an ophthalmologist. The subsequent arrest and torture of the teenagers by the Syrian government sparked protests that were met by harsh police retaliation. Several protesters were shot and killed by the Syrian police. The events of March 2011 catalyzed the violent conflagration that eventually spread and consumed the country.

***2011***—Following the protests in March, Bashar al-Assad takes swift actions in an attempt to stifle the growing unrest in the country. His release of political prisoners, the removal of an almost half-century old state of emergency, and promise of a “national dialogue,” however, fail to halt the anti-government protests. In May, Assad orders tanks to Dar'aa, Homs, Banyas, and several suburbs of Damascus to put down protests and sends troops to Jisr al-Shughour and Hama, respectively, in June and July.

Meanwhile, the international community grows increasingly concerned. The United States and European Union toughen sanctions on Syria, and the IAEA formally voices its concern about a possible secret nuclear reactor program in a report to the United Nations Security Council. The Arab League suspends Syria from its membership and imposes sanctions on the country as well. However, China and Russia veto a U.N. resolution that would denounce Syria in October 2011.

The opposition to Assad’s government begins to organize in the remaining months of 2011, meeting first in July in Istanbul and forming the Syrian National Council in October. In November, the Free Syrian Army stages a large attack on a government military base near Damascus.

The brutal violence and dire refugee situation that comes to characterize the Syrian crisis emerge early in the conflict. Government troops’ besiegement of cities result in both many civilian casualties and the flight of thousands of refugees, and suicide bombers in Damascus contribute to the rising death toll.

***2012***—The second year of the conflict brings an escalation in almost all dimensions of the crisis. Assad’s government redoubles its efforts to quash the opposition forces, retaking territory seized by the rebels and increasing its bombings of cities such as Homs, drawing notable opprobrium from the international community. Although the U.N. Security Council encounters Russian and Chinese resistance to both another Security Council draft resolution on Syria and the non-binding peace statement drafted by U.N. special envoy, Kofi Annan (former Secretary General of the U.N.), the U.N. took appreciable steps to condemn the dangerously deteriorating situation in Syria. In May 2012, the U.N. Security Council “strongly condemns” Assad’s government for its use of “heavy weaponry” and for the deaths of over one hundred civilians in Houla at the hands of the military. The U.N.

General Assembly passes two resolutions<sup>1</sup>, A/RES/66/253 A and A/RES/66/253 B<sup>2</sup>, condemning the numerous human rights violations, the violence against civilians, and the refugee crisis, and calling for “an inclusive Syrian-led political transition to a democratic, pluralistic political system.”<sup>3</sup> Resolution A/RES/66/253 B also expresses concern regarding the possible use of chemical or biological weapons by the Syrian government. As attested by the General Assembly Resolutions, the violence of the situation in Syria as well as the scale of the refugee situation spiked dramatically in 2012, contributing to the overall escalation of the conflict.

Like the United Nations, individual nation-states increase their involvement in the Syrian situation. France, the United Kingdom, Spain, Germany, Canada, Italy, and Australia order the removal of “senior Syrian diplomats” from their soil in response to the Houla killings in May. U.S. President Obama, in his remarks to the White House Press Corps in August, states that the U.S. has informed the Assad government that the use or transport of chemical weapons would cross a “red line” and result in “enormous consequences.”<sup>4</sup> Following the deaths of Turkish nationals at the hands of Assad’s forces in the downing of a Turkish aircraft and an incident of cross-border mortar fire, Turkey adopts a strong stance against the Syrian government. The Turkish government bans Syrian planes from its airspace and states that any Syrian troop movement towards the Turkish border would be considered a “military threat.”<sup>5</sup> After a few months of “occasional shelling” by the Syrian government forces, Israel returns fire, targeting Syrian artillery, in “the first such return of fire since the Yom Kippur War 1973.”<sup>6</sup> In November of 2012, Qatar hosts a meeting of multiple “major” rebel forces in which the groups united as the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces.<sup>7</sup> By December, the U.S., the United Kingdom, France, and the Gulf states have officially acknowledged the National Coalition as the “legitimate representative’ of the Syrian people.”<sup>8</sup>

The Syrian opposition makes several significant gains in 2012. The Free Syrian Army successfully fends off the government’s attempt to retake Aleppo and strikes the Syrian military’s headquarters in Damascus with two explosions in September. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the disparate opposition forces including the Syrian National Council meet in Qatar in November to organize into a unified body, the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. However, the membership of the new National Coalition did not include several armed Islamist groups in Aleppo (such as Al-

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.un.org/en/ga/66/resolutions.shtml?utm\\_source=ISHR+Publications+and+News&utm\\_campaign=5c82fc08a8-RSS\\_Email\\_Campaign\\_General\\_Assembly&utm\\_medium=email](http://www.un.org/en/ga/66/resolutions.shtml?utm_source=ISHR+Publications+and+News&utm_campaign=5c82fc08a8-RSS_Email_Campaign_General_Assembly&utm_medium=email)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/66/253%20B](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/66/253%20B)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/66/253%20B](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/66/253%20B)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/08/20/remarks-president-white-house-press-corps>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703995>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703995>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703995>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703995>

Nusra and Al-Tawhid) that declined to join. An increase in “high-level defections,”<sup>9</sup> of which Prime Minister Riad Hijab was one, further bolsters the cause of the opposition.

**2013**—The situation in Syria worsens in 2013 as the fight between Assad’s regime and the rebels continues with victory for neither in sight. Syrian government forces, with support from Hezbollah, continue to attack the opposition’s gains, bombing rebel-held cities, killing thousands of civilians and inflicting enormous damage on the country’s infrastructure. The rebels experience a difficult year, facing organizational and leadership challenges within the opposition movement and National Coalition as well as hesitant and inadequate international aid while battling Assad’s forces. The interim Prime Minister elected by Ghassan Hitto by the National Coalition in March resigns in July, unable to form a rebel government. National Coalition chairman Moaz al-Khatib steps down in April, citing foreign government interference in the Coalition. George Sabra, the head of the Syrian National Council, a more veteran opposition group, assumes the chairmanship in an interim capacity and in July is replaced by Ahmed Jarba. While the U.S. and U.K. promise “non-lethal” aid to the rebels in April, the Western nations hesitate to supply the opposition with arms due to the presence of Islamist militant groups in the opposition movement, prompting protests from rebel commanders.<sup>10</sup> In December 2013, the U.S. and U.K. impose a temporary halt on “non-lethal” aid to the opposition in northern Syria in response to reports that Islamist rebels had taken several bases belonging to the Free Syrian Army. Despite the challenges, however, the opposition takes Khan al-Assal, “the last major government-held town in the west of Aleppo” in July 2013.<sup>11</sup>

Further gains for the rebels include the successful removal of all declared chemical weapons agents and precursors from Syria. In April, the U.S. and U.K. governments insist upon an investigation of the alleged use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government. Several months later in September, U.N. weapons inspectors confirm that chemical weapons had been used in August attacks in Ghouta (a part of Damascus) but did not explicitly designate the responsible party. Subsequent cooperation between the U.S. and Russia result in a negotiated agreement in which all chemical weapons agents and precursors were to be removed from Syria. In June, the OPCW reports that all declared agents and precursors had been evacuated from the country.<sup>12</sup>

International involvement in Syria complicates rapidly in 2013. While pledges of funds for humanitarian aid are not absent, the Western nations hesitate to provide military assistance, such as arms, to the rebels in light of the growing participation of Islamist militias and groups in the opposition camp. As more people flee the crisis in Syria, the refugee counts in neighboring Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan number close to half a million for each as of July 2013.<sup>13</sup> Israel clashes with the Assad regime allegedly striking

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703995>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703995>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703995>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2014/07/economist-explains-11>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2013/jul/25/syrian-refugee-crisis-in-numbers-updated>



government vehicles suspected of carrying weapons and exchanging fire in the Golan Heights with the Syrian army.<sup>14 15</sup>

**2014**—The humanitarian situation in Syria grows more dire while the battles between the rebels and Assad’s regime continue. With the renewed turmoil in Iraq<sup>16</sup>, increasingly bold ventures of the Islamic State, and the outbreak of conflict between Hamas and Israel, the future of the Syrian civil war appears ever more uncertain.

In the winter of 2014, the U.N.-moderated talks between the rebels and Syrian government in Geneva fail to achieve a peace agreement. The U.N. Security Council, however, manages to pass a resolution in February ordering all combatant groups to put an end to the obstruction of delivery of humanitarian aid to Syria. Met with Syrian government noncompliance, U.N. officials, citing the February resolutions, sends convoy trucks with necessary relief supplies into Syria in July. In March, the Syrian army retakes “Yabroud, the last rebel stronghold near the Lebanese border”<sup>17</sup> with the help of Hezbollah.

Israel continues to retaliate against the Syrian Army’s incursions into the Golan Heights, targeting Syrian army facilities.

## Committee Basics

The official start date of the committee will be August 25, 2013. This date has been specifically chosen to present a very unique position to both committees in the simulation. This is one week after serious allegations arose that the Syrian regime deployed chemical weapons, and the international community is considering how to respond. Within the Syrian opposition, there are serious signs of deteriorating relations between the various factions, and this is certain to greatly impact the future of the civil war. At the very start of this committee, the Syrian rebels will need to develop a way to respond to the chemical weapons issue in Syria, while at the same time navigating the difficulties of maintaining an alliance between such radically different factions. The future of Syrian opposition and the Syrian people lies in the hands of the delegates of this committee.

While there is more than enough research and information on what has happened in Syria since the start date of this committee, delegates should only refer to facts and address situations that are relevant at or prior to the start date of this committee. Recent developments after the start date may be helpful for research and information, but they are not to be referred to in committee. Events and other developments after the start date are not relevant to committee. Instead, the moment delegates enter the committee room,

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703995>

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/tensions-build-on-israel-syria-border/2013/04/17/9bcca7fe-a77e-11e2-b029-8fb7e977ef71\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/tensions-build-on-israel-syria-border/2013/04/17/9bcca7fe-a77e-11e2-b029-8fb7e977ef71_story.html)

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/21/world/middleeast/un-leader-deplores-syria-wars-spread-to-iraq.html>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703995>

the crisis staff will develop a new thread and story for the Syrian opposition, and the delegates of the committee will then be expected to respond to what the crisis staff come up with.

## Topics for Research

In your preparatory research, it may be helpful to consider examining the following issues surrounding the crisis. I have included a few questions for some topics to help guide your research. Your research for each topic does not need to be comprehensive by any means nor do you have to include all the topics in your position paper. These topics and questions are merely intended to help you familiarize yourself with issues pertinent to the committee. I have grouped the topics into three overarching groups. Do make sure to be familiar with topics in all three of the groups.

### ***I. INTERNAL ISSUES***

The Syrian opposition has long been divided amongst each other due to religious, ethnic, and other sectarian differences. Although both secular and Islamist rebel groups find a common enemy in the Assad regime, there is no clear answer as to what a post-Assad Syria would look like, and whether that Syria should be shaped according to the wishes and beliefs of one side or the other. These differences will continue to impact the future of the Syrian people and the viability of a post-Assad government. Delegates of the Syrian opposition will have to navigate the internal conflict within their committee.

The Syrian civil war has generated a humanitarian crisis of a staggering magnitude, with millions of internally displaced people and refugees in the region. This mass migration of people has led to instability and uncertainty over their futures as they attempt to make a living in nearby countries. This has prompted the international community to dispatch large amounts of humanitarian aid, the flow of which is greatly affected by actions taken by both sides in the conflict. The Syrian rebels will have to address the need for international aid while at the same time militarily pressing the Assad regime.

#### ***Internal Conflict within the Syrian Opposition***

Which groups constitute the Syrian opposition? What are the points of contention between the groups? What are the sources of conflict between the groups? What kind of obstacles does each group face? What is the cultural, religious, socioeconomic, national, and ethnic background of each group?

#### ***International Aid***

Which actors are providing aid? Which actors are receiving aid? What kinds of



aid are being/have been provided or offered? How much aid is being provided or offered? Is the aid being delivered? How is the aid being delivered?

### ***Syrian Refugee Crisis***

### ***Religious and Ethnic Differences in Syria and the Surrounding Region***

## ***II. WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION***

The Assad regime has been known to possess and produce weapons of mass destruction, specifically chemical weapons. These chemical weapons may be deployed against both rebel and civilian targets, an act that would lead to widespread international outrage. Use of any weapons of mass destruction constitutes a clear violation of international law and standards of conduct in war. The Syrian rebels will have to address the Assad regime's potential use of WMDs and decide how to deal with the weapons should they even come in contact with or gain possession of them.

### ***Chemical Weapons***

What are the components of a chemical weapon? What is required to create/deploy effectively a chemical weapon? Why would a chemical weapon be used rather than a conventional or other type of weapon? What are the international laws pertaining to chemical weapons? What is the history of chemical weapons in Syria and the region?

### ***Nuclear Weapons***

What are some types of nuclear weapons that would most likely be used in the Syrian conflict? What is required to create/deploy effectively a nuclear weapon? Which groups would use a nuclear weapon? What is required to create/deploy effectively a nuclear weapon? Why would a nuclear weapon be used rather than a conventional or other type of weapon? What has been the history of nuclear weapons in Syria and in the Middle East?

### ***Biological Weapons***

What are the components of a biological weapon? What is required to create/deploy effectively a biological weapon? Which groups would use a biological weapon? Why would a biological weapon be used rather than a conventional or other type of weapon?

## ***III. THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE***

As the conflict continues, battle lines have been drawn amongst the international community. The Arab League has overwhelmingly condemned the Assad regime and has recognized the Syrian National Coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. Meanwhile, other neighboring powers such as Iran have strongly supported the Assad regime, going so far as to send Iranian military leaders and troops. Abroad, Russia and China remain solid supporters of Assad, while the European Union and the United

States have indicated their support for the Syrian rebels. The Syrian opposition will have to consider how to convince the EU and the US to turn their rhetoric into action in support of the rebels. It may also be of importance to think about how to address Iranian intervention and potential Chinese and Russian support for Assad.

### *Foreign Actors' Involvement*

Which nations, groups, and individuals are actively involved in the Syrian crisis? Why are they involving themselves? What is the nature of their involvement? How long have they been involved? How are they interacting with the other actors in the Syrian crisis? Be sure to pay particular attention to the involvement of ISIS; Western powers including the United States; NATO; the U.N.; countries bordering Syria such as Lebanon and Jordan; and regional nation-states such as Qatar, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Focus also on the issue of borders in the Syrian conflagration. How does this issue fit into the wider turmoil in the Middle East?

## Roles

Representative of the Free Syrian Army -- Colonel Abd al-Ilah al-Bashir  
(chief-of-staff of the FSA Supreme Military Council)

Representative of Jabhat al Nusra -- Abu Muhammad al-Julani (leader of Jabhat al Nusra)

Representative of the al-Tawhid Islamic Front -- Abu Bakr al-Hawleri (leader)

Representative of the Islamic State -- Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, aka Abu Du'a (leader)

Representatives of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front

The Idlib Military Council -- Colonel Afif Suleiman (leader)

The Syria Martyrs' Brigade -- Jamal Maarouf)

The Ahrar al-Zawia Brigades -- Ahmed Yahia al-Khatib

The Ansar Brigades -- Mithqal al-Abdullah

Representative of the Harakat Haz\* (Resoluteness Movement)

Representative Mujahednu Army\*

Representative of Syrian National Coalition – Hadi al-Bahra (president)

Representative of the Free Aleppo Police -- Brigadier General Adib Clav (leader)

Representative to the Gulf States (Free Syrian Army)

Representative to the U.S. (Free Syrian Army)

Representative to the E.U. (Syrian National Coalition)

Representative to Russia (Syrian National Coalition)

Representative to the U.N. (Free Syrian Army)

Representative to al Qaeda (al-Tawhid Islamic Front)

Representative to Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey (Syrian National Coalition)

Representative of Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar – Salahuddin al-Shishani

Representative of the Kurdish National Council—Feysel Yusuf (Chairman)

Representative of the Democratic Union Party (Syrian Kurdistan)—Salih Muslim

Vice President of the SNC – Riad Seif

Khaled Saleh, Head of the SNC Media Committee

Haitham al-Maleh, Head of the SNC Legal Committee

Suheir Atassi, Head of the SNC Humanitarian Committee

Marwan Hajo, Head of the SNC Membership Committee

Ali Basher, Commander of the Syrian Turkmen Brigades

Ali Sadreddine Al-Bayanouni, Head of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood