

Haileybury MUN

Research report



Special Committee on Syria

By: Oscar Lock and Mal Santosh

A Background of Syria

Since March 2011, Syria has been embroiled in an armed conflict, with a number of countries in the region and beyond involved militarily or otherwise. As a result, a number of self-proclaimed political entities have emerged on Syrian territory, including the Syrian opposition, Rojava, Tahrir al-Sham and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Syria is ranked last on the Global Peace Index. This gives us a piece of mind at just how violent the conflict has become and why we must work together to resolve it.

Why is there a war raging on?

Even before the conflict began, many Syrians were complaining about high unemployment, corruption and a lack of political freedom under President Bashar al-Assad, who succeeded his father Hafez after he died in 2000.

In March 2011, pro-democracy demonstrations erupted in the southern city of Deraa, inspired by the "Arab Spring" in neighbouring countries.

When the government used deadly force to crush the dissent, protests demanding the president's resignation erupted nationwide.

The unrest spread and the crackdown intensified. Opposition supporters took up arms, first to defend themselves and later to rid their areas of security forces. Mr Assad vowed to crush what he called "foreign-backed terrorism".

The Question of Foreign Interference

We can all agree that foreign interference in Syria is one of the key talking points as of late. Countries like Russia and the United States have enjoyed flexing their muscles and sinking their teeth in to Syria. For this reason, we can relate back to the good old cold war days with what's going on. The conflict has been described as a series of overlapping proxy wars between regional and world powers.

The Syrian Ba'athist government is politically and militarily supported by Iran and Russia, actively supported by Lebanese Hezbollah party and by Syrian-based Palestinian group PFLP-GC and others.

In 2012, just ten days after the then US President Barak Obama had promised a zero tolerance on chemical weapons, Assad had launched such an attack using Sarin on Damascus killing more than 1,000 people. This caused mayhem in international politics. Before this particular issue came to a head, there was a surprise in store. The Russians offered to remove the regime's chemical weapons stockpile to prevent such an attack.

It is far from clear what the impact of a US-led military intervention in 2013 would have been. It could have exacerbated the plight of Syria's civilians without toppling the regime or curtailing the war. It could have escalated uncontrollably – although it is difficult to see how things could be worse than they are now. We all know what happened next. With a new man in charge the US changed. Chemical weapons

were used again in Syria after direct warning from the UN not to. The US, the UK and France decided to use air strikes against Syria.

Another question does arise: what has or will this achieve?

Rebuilding war torn regions.

Syrian President Bashar Al Assad, has arguably won the war—largely due to the support of his chief allies Russia and Iran. The ‘victory’, however, came at an enormous cost.

While the international community typically steps up to provide reconstruction support when civil wars end, it has been reluctant to do so in Syria.

A number of Western states have been appalled at the way Al Assad has prosecuted this war and his willingness to ravage the entire country, displace half of the population, destroy civilian infrastructure and engage in massive war crimes, including the use of chemical weapons.

Given the amount of money Russia and Iran invested in keeping Al Assad in power, rebuilding offers them a chance to recoup some of the profits from their investment

However, the scale of destruction is so massive that such help will barely scratch the surface of the cost to rebuild which has been estimated to be between \$100 to \$300 billion. Al Assad, however, doesn’t seem to care.

Syrian Refugees

Since the Syrian civil war officially began March 15, 2011, families have suffered under a brutal conflict that has killed hundreds of thousands of people, torn the nation apart, and set back the standard of living by decades. About 13.1 million people in the country need humanitarian assistance.

Syrians fleeing conflict often leave everything behind. So they need all the basics to sustain their lives: food, clothing, healthcare, shelter, and household and hygiene items. Refugees also need reliable supplies of clean water, as well as sanitation facilities. Children need a safe environment and a chance to play and go to school. Adults need employment options in cases of long-term displacement.

People are held up in France waiting to cross in to the UK. Some get desperate and cross the channel by boat. Everyone can agree, the situation is harrowing and something must be done and fast. Here is a handy video for the Syrian refugee crisis. https://youtu.be/E_vPoGM_GVM