

Research Report

MUNISH '12



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| Forum | Security Council |
| Issue: | The Question of Syria |
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| Position: | President of the Security Council, MUNISH 2012 |

Introduction

Regarded as being the last battle of the Arab Spring revolutions, the conflict and crisis in Syria have been running since March 2011. The conflict has claimed thousands of lives, though the exact figure is impossible to verify, with the UN ceasing its attempts to evaluate the death toll, due to difficulties in verifying figures. The July 2012 estimate from the Syrian Observatory on Human Rights puts the toll at more than 19,000 persons (including government forces, rebels and civilians) since the beginning of the crisis. For a brief time, a UN observer mission was active in the country, though operations were suspended due to persistently increasing violence in contravention of a peace plan put forward by Kofi Annan, the UN-Arab League envoy. The Security Council has had very little practical involvement in the situation beyond authorising the observer mission. In fact, three resolutions threatening Syria with sanctions unless violence against civilians was ceased have been vetoed by the Russian Federation and China. This significant division in the Security Council has left it unable to act, while the crisis continues. The United Nations General Assembly voted in early August to condemn its own Security Council for lack of action.

NOTE: All information in this report is correct as of 19th August 2012. This issue is constantly changing and it is highly advised for delegates to keep abreast of the situation, as it is highly likely that the situation is changed by August.

Definition of Key Terms

Arab Spring

'Arab Spring' is the term that refers to a collection of anti-government uprisings and revolutions in North African and Middle Eastern states that began in Tunisia in 2010.

Alawites

The Alawites are a minority religious sect. President Assad of Syria belongs to this sect, as do many of Syria's current leaders and military officials. The Alawites are considered an offshoot of Islam, but they observe certain aspects of other religions, such as Christmas from Christianity. They also do not observe certain tenets of Islam, such as the five pillars of Islam, and Alawite women do not wear headscarves. Throughout their history they have been a minority group and have been ostracised by the rest of Islam. They began to come to prominence during the French occupation of Syria, when they began to work their way up through the military ranks. Note: The French occupation heavily recruited minorities to face down an Islamic insurgency. Today, there are fears that President Assad may try to create an Alawite state if he cannot hold Syria. Certainly there are reports of much sectarian violence in areas of Syria, with Alawites 'carving out' areas by removing persons of other religions. The notorious Shabiha militia, which has been accused of/has carried out acts of brutal violence is also predominantly Alawite, helping to explain their fanatical loyalty to Assad.

General Overview

Basic Facts:

Formal Name: Syrian Arab Republic

Population: 22, 530, 746

(Major) Ethnic Groups: Arab 90.3 %, Kurds, Armenians and other; 9.7%

Official Language: Arabic

Religions: Sunni Muslim 74%, other Muslim 16%, Christian (various denominations) 10%, small Jewish communities in some cities

Bordering Nations: Turkey, Lebanon, Israel, Iraq, Jordan

Head of State: President Bashar al-Asad

Head of Government: Prime Minister Riad Farid Hijab

Next (scheduled) Presidential Election: May 2014



Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Syrian Arab Republic (State)

The bracketed 'state' is affixed to indicate the difference between the Syrian state, and other Syrian parties such as the Free Syrian Army. Headed by President Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian state has been responsible for the brutal crackdown on the uprisings in Syria. The view put forward by the state is steadfast, that the opposition are nothing more than terrorists.

Free Syrian Army

The 'official' Syrian opposition, the Free Syrian Army is the main force fighting against the State. It is largely comprised of defected Syrian Army troops, though as with the revolution in Libya especially, many civilians also take to arms. Their avowed purpose, as set forward by their official website is to defend Syria and her people from the oppression of the State.

Turkey

Turkey is a NATO member in close proximity to Syria. Analysts have said that in the event of any military intervention in Syria, Turkey would probably play a large role. Many consider Syrian-Turkish relations to have declined since the beginning of the Syrian Crisis, with Syria downing a Turkish fighter that apparently entered Syrian airspace. Syria did later apologise for the incident. Turkey is also believed to be discussing with the United States, the possibility of supplying the rebels with surface-to-air missiles to assist the opposition.

United States

The US, recently allowed a Syrian Opposition-affiliated organisation a license to fundraise in the United States, allowing financial support to flow from the US to the Syrian Opposition. The United States' view, in a nutshell is of support for the Syrian Opposition. The US has voted in favour of the Security Council resolutions on Syria.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has been among the leaders of Western efforts in the Security Council to implement resolutions calling for sanctions. In addition, it has been announced that the UK is to increase aid to the Syrian opposition, though this will limit to non-lethal aid. The UK has put forward, and voted in favour of, resolutions demanding sanctions on Syria.

Russian Federation

The Russian Federation has longstanding ties with Syria and should the opposition prevail, it seems likely that this Russian-friendly state will be replaced by a newly democratic Syria, which might look towards the West for its allies, rather than to Russia. Syria is also a strategic ally for Russia, being in the Middle East, a region that (with the revolutions of the

Arab Spring) is increasing looking to the West for friendship. Russia is utterly against military intervention, and has vetoed resolutions demanding sanctions.

People's Republic of China

Unlike the Russian Federation, China has no longstanding diplomatic ties to Syria. However, analysts speculate that China's veto of resolutions demanding sanctions may be to avoid setting a precedent that may be applied in future to its troubled regions of Tibet and Xinjiang. A further theory is that China is uneasy about passing such resolutions since Western nations interpreted the resolution passed on Libya as allowing them to intervene militarily and attack the Gaddafi government. China is also utterly against military intervention, and has also vetoed the resolutions calling for sanctions. However, China has made statements declaring that it supports the UN playing an important role in resolving the crisis, though it has not elaborated precisely how.

Timeline of Events

The timeline below details the events in Syria since the beginning of the crisis. It should be noted that the Assad family has held dictatorial power in Syria for approximately 40 years, since Hafez al-Assad took the presidency in a plebiscite in 1971. Bashar al-Assad succeeded his father as president in 2000, and has led since then.

| Date | Description of event |
|---------------------|--|
| March 2011 | Demonstrations by protesters demanding the release of political prisoners. Security forces open fire and some protesters are killed, demonstrations spread throughout Syria. |
| 22 April 2011 | 72 demonstrators are killed by security forces in a suburb of Damascus |
| 3 October 2011 | Opposition groups (from in Turkey) form the Syrian National Council, vowing to overthrow President al-Assad. |
| 12 November 2011 | Syria is suspended by the Arab League, as the League accuses it of failing to implement a peace plan. Sanctions are also imposed. |
| December 2011 | 70 defectors from the Syrian army are reported massacred by state forces on 19 th December. 111 persons, mostly army defectors, are reported massacred the next day by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (London). |
| February-March 2012 | Syrian forces begin shelling the city of Homs, in a month-long bombardment. |
| 21 March 2012 | Security Council backs the peace plan put forward by Kofi Annan, the joint UN-Arab League envoy. The plan sets out measures to cease violence, provide humanitarian aid, and peacefully transfer power. The plan is accepted by the Syrian Government. |
| 18 April 2012 | UN observers begin their mission in Syria, to monitor the situation. |
| 10 May 2012 | Explosions blamed on suicide bombers outside the military intelligence building in |

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| | Damascus kill 55 persons. The government blames this and other similar attacks on anti-regime forces and al-Quaeda, whereas the opposition accuses the government of staging the attacks to discredit them. |
| 25 May 2012 | UN observers confirm 108 people killed in the Houla region. Government blames terrorists, but survivors and human rights groups blame the army and government-allied militias |
| 16 June 2012 | UN observers cease their mission due to the continuing escalation of violence. |
| 22 June 2012 | Syria claims to have shot down a Turkish fighter jet that came down in Syrian waters. A statement made by Turkish authorities says that Syria had apologised, calling the incident a mistake. |
| 12 July 2012 | Up to 220 persons killed in Tremseh. Witnesses report bombardment by army tanks, preceding attack by militias. |
| 18 July 2012 | A suicide attack at the national security headquarters kills the Minister for Defence, his deputy (president al-Assad's brother-in-law) and a general. The interior minister and national security chief are also reported injured. The Free Syrian Army and a jihadist group called 'Lord of the Maryrs Brigade' both claim responsibility. |
| 19 July 2012 | Russia and China veto a resolution threatening Syria with sanctions unless violence ceased. This is the third resolution of its kind vetoed by these parties. |

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Two resolutions have been passed on Syria, but three resolutions calling for sanctions failed. All three that failed were defeated by vetoes from Russia and China. UN involvement has consisted of an observer mission, which left in June. The only presence now is a small civilian office to maintain political contacts.

A peace plan was put forward by Kofi Annan, the text of which may be found [here](#).

While the Security Council has been unable to put forward sanctions to compel the Syrian State, Resolutions 2042 (2012) and 2043 (2012) do call for an end to violence, that the peace plan be followed, and create the military observer mission that later failed.

The UN General Assembly voted on a draft resolution that condemned the situation in Syria, and deplored the Security Council's lack of agreement. This draft demands an end to all violence in Syria. Irrespective of origin. This draft was adopted by significant majority on 31 July 2012.

Links to both Security Council resolutions and the GA draft resolution may be found in the appendix.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

In terms of UN attempts to solve the issue, there is only one verdict that can be passed. The significant attempts that have been made have failed utterly, due to the vetoes by Russia and China. It is clear that the al-Assad regime is friendly to these nations, and that it is in the national interest of these nations to maintain a friendly presence in Syria. After all, the Arab Spring has created a host of newly democratised states, freed from dictators that were often more friendly with Russia and China than with the West. The new incarnations of these North African and Middle Eastern states are considered to be friendlier with the West than with their old allies. It is in the national interest of Russia and China to have an ally/friendly state in the region, and with the Syrian regime gone, their influence diminishes significantly.

National interest aside, in considering the effectiveness of attempts at solving the crisis, the glaring cause of their lack of effect is this division in the Security Council that prevents effective sanctions from being applied. Yes, individual states and groups (such as the US, EU, UK, etc) can and have applied sanctions against Syria, but as long as there is no unified effort stemming from a binding Security Council resolution, there will always be ways and means around such sanctions as are applied.

Of course it might be said that the UN observer mission and 6-point peace plan put forwards by Kofi Annan are also attempts at resolving the issue. Both are also abject failures. The presence of UN observers failed to prevent violence – the mission left as violence had continued to escalate, despite their presence. The peace plan looked hopeful, when the Assad regime accepted it, before the world realised that the Syrian State had no intention of holding to its word, or engaging in any kind of negotiation with opposition forces.

Possible Solutions

In the previous section, it was highlighted how plausibly effective measures to deal with the problem, or at least display a united front in the Security Council against the conflict, could not be brought into existence due to the split in Council opinion.

Therein lies the problem. While surely no one would agree that the world should merely look on while this struggle is played out, while civilians are brutally killed, that is the situation we find ourselves in. For the Security Council to take action, accord is required, and in this case it seems likely that it shall have to come from Russia and China. The proposed resolutions that were vetoed contained only sanctions, the drafters having been careful to exclude the possibility of military action (as seen in Libya), which Russia and China are utterly against. It is hard to see how the drafters could make concessions; sanctions are perhaps the lowliest measure that the Security Council can take that might have any effect in Syria.

The first step in the UN, **must** be to gain agreement on measures to be taken. This will be difficult, if not impossible. Without Russia and China on board, or at least abstaining, no measure can go forward in the Security Council. If this can be solved, to resolve the situation Assad must go, without this the conflict will simply continue. The dissent may have begun as a demonstration to free political prisoners, but more than a year on, with thousands dead at the hands of the Assad regime it seems hugely unlikely that the Syrian people would accept the continued rule of the dictator who has inflicted this upon them.

If a compromise is found in the Security Council, any resolution stemming from this might be wise to include measures about the sectarian violence. (For an explanation on this violence please see the definitions section, under 'Alawites')

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Appendix or Appendices

I: [S/RES/2042 \(2012\)](#)

[S/RES/2043 \(2012\)](#)



[A/66/1.57](#) (draft resolution in the General Assembly, see UN involvement section)