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# Security Council

## The Situation in Syria



**MODEL UNITED NATIONS**  
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## Introduction

The Syrian Civil War began seven years ago as the result of peaceful protests against the President Bashar al-Assad in regards to issues such as, high unemployment, corruption and lack of political freedom, being silenced through use of deadly force by the Syrian government. These demonstration favoring democracy within Syria in March of 2011 were largely inspired by the 'Arab Spring' which had taken place in neighboring Arab countries. The opposition to the government quickly took arms and were met by vows from their president for their rebellion to be crushed (BBC).

This ongoing conflict includes the involvement of several nations. It has a rising death toll in the hundreds of thousands with a large portion of which being civilian lives. There are divisions being made within the country by the involved parties and a prominent issue faced by the world in terms of the acceptance of the large number of refugees caused by the conflict (BBC).

Generally speaking the Syrian Civil War is one of a high complexity, spanning over a significant time period with various national parties each of which having their own separate foreign backers. As stated the conflict can be traced back to peaceful protest in 2011 and the formation of the first armed opposing force to the government, the Free Syrian Army, later



that year. These are the two original opponents in the conflict, the people of Syria against their government and their army. Through the development of the conflict the involvement of extremist Jihadists becomes more apparent with them travelling from around the world in support of the rebellion. President al-Assad was even in support of this development so as to complicate the possibility for foreign nations to support the rebellion (Vox).

Around a similar time also comes the informal splintering of Syrian Kurdish groups, taking up arms against Assad's rule in the north of Syria. As the conflict continues it becomes a proxy war with the involvement of Iran in support of the Syrian government and the Gulf States and Turkey in support of their opposition as well as numerous different parties standing on different sides. It continues however with Assad's use of chemical weapons on civilians in 2013 leading to the instigation of the USA and later also Russia making the conflict in Syria a global power's dispute (Vox).

There are differing interactions between involved parties in the Syrian Civil War. Beyond this there are also disputes within alliances on their values within the conflict. This makes the Syrian Civil War difficult to unravel and find a clear solution to. What is clear, however, is that there is a rising death toll within the conflict, a conflict that has left the nation in ruins. It has led to significant consequences for the people of Syria, many of which have chosen to leave the country. This issue has been a focal point of the Security Council for many years and a prominent issue in world news. Strides have been made to solution however such as under the Geneva convention as well as the momentum being gained towards legal prosecution of the Syrian government.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Chemical Weapons

A toxic chemical contained in a delivery system, such as a bomb or a shell.



## Extremists

A person who holds extreme political or religious views, especially one who advocates illegal, violent or other extreme action

## Sunni Islam

A major branch of Islam consisting of the majority of the religions adherents. Sunni Muslims regard their denomination as the traditionalist and mainstream branch of Islam.

## Shia Islam

Also referred to as Shī'ite, it is a smaller division of Islam in regards to the Sunni but still one of the two major branches.

## Internally Displaced Person(s)

Internally Displaced Person (IDP) is someone who is forced to flee his or her home but remains within his or her country's borders. There are roughly 6.5 million IDPs in Syria.



## General Overview

### History

In March of 2011, the government of President Bashar al-Assad faced the opposition of pro-democracy protests throughout the country. The protesters were acting on the behavior of the regime in Syria, that being in many cases oppressive to the Syrian people. This involved the use of violence as an answer to protests, under which an already heightened use of the Syrian army and other governmental forces (Britannica).

At this time Arabian countries, not only Syria, were seeing an increase in protest and demonstrations. This was referred to as the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring was a streak of anti-government protests and rebellions throughout the Middle East at the beginning of 2011. The success of which is debated amongst Arab countries. This was, however, an inspiration for the people of Syria to take action for themselves in their own nation. President Assad had acknowledged the economic difficulty faced within Syria but believed that his political reform would come in time and in support of the Syrian people due to his opposing stance towards the USA and Israel which he believed was amongst his people's core interests (Britannica).

The protests continued, however, proving that Assad's control over the situation may be more futile than he was willing to admit at the time. Assad initially carried a political reputation that was inclined towards a further liberalization of the country but this quickly reversed into a tyrannical form of rule. Alongside economic and political difficulties Syria also faced environmental hardship in the form of a prolonged drought between 2006 and 2010, this was of significance due to the social and economic impact it had on the country leading up to the revolution. As also referenced in the key terms section the conflict had roots of religious differences with the protesters largely belonging to the Sunni majority whilst the family of Assad were a part of the 'Alawite minority. These divisions became more pronounced with the depiction created by Assad of the Sunni people as Islamic extremists (Britannica).



The protests only worsened and proportionally so did the government's opposition towards it with additional military action being taken through utilities being cut off and the use of military vehicles such as tanks driving refugees out of the country. This escalating situation did not go unnoticed with local and more international players splitting between pro and anti-Assad camps. Those opposing the Assad government included the United States as well as the European Union with heads of state, under which Barack Obama, calling for Assad to step down as president. Syria's longstanding allies of Russia and Iran continued their support for the Syrian government. These big international rivalries were also reflected in the UN security council with vetoes being made by both Russia and China preventing resolutions involving the condemnation of Assad (Britannica).

By September of 2011 organized Militias were attacking the Syrian army regularly turning the issue into a Civil War. The Free Syrian Army claimed the face of the rebel effort as an overarching organization but was not always recognized by local groups. The Syrian Civil War is not only a conflict within its own borders but also an example of failed diplomacy. This is seen in the lack of credibility to delegations sent by the Arab League into Syria as well as failed ceasefires early on in the conflict in April of 2012. Due to this lack of results from the efforts of the UN and the Arab League, international assistance was called upon in a conference organized by the UN in June of 2012. This was meant to provide clarity on the future of negotiations with the Syrian government. With conflicting donors in the issue all out to seek their own best interests the previous coalition representing the Syrian people, the Syrian National Council (SNC), fell apart. In November of 2012, the formation of a new coalition was announced by the Syrian opposition leaders named the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces and received recognition by dozens of different countries (Britannica).

The rebels saw tactical success throughout mid-2012 forcing the withdrawal of government troops in the north and east of the country as well as having attacked Aleppo in

July. A stalemate was seemingly underway though in early 2013 leading to the increase of international support. This included Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar funding and arming Syrian rebels. Along with this also came a secret order from President Barack Obama to the CIA to train rebel groups in Syria. Opposing them remained Iran who had hundreds of officers on the ground in Syria and incoming cargo flights to supply Assad. Complementing this was the Lebanese group, Hezbollah, who was backed by Iran. They invaded Syria and vowed to fight for Assad. This only led to an increase of support by the Gulf States towards the rebels (Vox).

A significant turning point in the conflict is the first use of chemical weapons on August 21st, 2013 in Damascus killing hundreds. Assad's forces were blamed for the attack however they denied any involvement. The US, Britain and France condemned the act and announced their consideration of retaliatory strikes. Russia, China and Iran opposed the idea of military action and Assad heavily opposed this new western involvement. These western forces did not end up acting on their claims but an agreement was reached however on September 14th, 2013, between Russia, Syria and the US to place all of Syria's chemical weapons under international control. This was then indeed carried out (Britannica).

Islamist militants did become more prominent in the conflict in 2013 with the operation of al-Qaeda affiliates in Syria and later the formation of a new group in April through the joint al-Qaeda forces from both Iraq and Syria using the name Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, ISIL (also known as ISIS). This group expanded their power of territory in both Syria and Iraq. This led to the conflict becoming pressurized for western nations with the US launching airstrikes on ISIS in Iraq in order to slow their advance. The group was made famous however through their imagery spread online of decapitations of western aid workers and their anti-western extremism causing the expansion of the American airstrike campaign (Britannica).



Russia's involvement also expanded in 2015 with the deployment of troops and equipment at their airbase. These were claimed to be targeted on ISIS but had a clear focus on fighting against the Syrian rebel groups. After the collapse of a ceasefire in September 2016, the focus was shifted towards Aleppo which was rebel-held at the time. This included a remorseless bombing campaign on the city with no regards towards civilian casualties and aid workers being specifically targeted. ISIS, after a seemingly unstoppable rise, began to diminish in 2016 through the pressure of its conflict with Kurdish forces who were backed by the US, pro-Assad forces and a Turkish rebel coalition group. After the continuation of this pressure, they were forced out of Dayr al-Zawr in November 2017 (Britannica). Chemical attacks have been furthered in 2018 such as the deaths of 70 people in Douma on April 7th.

## Current Issues

Following a six week operation by Syrian government forces they claimed victory in Eastern Ghouta on April 1st of 2018 after having killed 1700 civilians. This was the last rebel outpost on the outskirts of Damascus. Another chemical attack took place on April 7th on the city of Douma, killing 40. Assad denied the claims made for his responsibility and Russia vetoed the UN resolution to allow investigators access to the site. Airstrikes have been executed by the US, France and the UK on chemical weapons facilities near Damascus in response to the attacks on April 14th (CFR).

Foreign influence still remains of significance with the leaders of Iran, Turkey and Russia agreeing to protect Syria's territorial integrity and ensuring for a cease fire. This also occurred in April of 2018. US president Donald J. Trump also announced that two thousand US troops would remain in Syria to fight the Islamic State alongside their continued involvement in the conflict (CFR).

As of the writing of this report more that 400,000 people have been killed or are missing as a result of the conflict (See Appendix A). Air strikes are currently the most





common cause for loss of life with shootings and shelling having been more common place at the start of the Civil War (See Appendix C). More than half of the Syrian population has been displaced since 2011 with roughly 5.6 million refugees and 6.1 million people internally displaced. Many Syrian refugees flee to neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan but also European countries such as Germany and Sweden. Within the conflict there have also been 492 attacks on medical facilities as well as 847 medical personnel killed (BBC).

## Major Parties Involved

### Syrian Government and the Free Syrian Army

Naturally the conflict originates between the opposition of the Syrian people towards their government. With President Bashar al-Assad having been in office since the year 2000 he is the face of the Syrian government and their acts against the Syrian rebel groups opposing him. Syria had become an independent republic following their French rule during WW2 in 1946. Following a series of coups and transitions in power, Hafez al-Assad declared himself president. Following his death his son took the position. Initially inciting hope towards reform none of these promises were met. Instead, the continuation of an authoritarian style of government, much to the dismay of the Syrian people (Wikipedia).

The Free Syrian Army was formed on the 29th of July 2011. It was initially created by officers of the Syrian Armed Forces. Their goal as a group was stated as being to bring down the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad. At the start of the War it was seen as the main representation of the rebel effort in Syria but has since dissipated in its cohesion. As of 2015 it contained 35,000 members. Their approach within the conflict was not to hold territory but rather to spread thin the forces of the Syrian government under which the destabilization of Damascus. The FSA is and has always been comprised of a large number of different armed



groups. The FSA has also seen international support such as moderate provisions in arms from the US under the Obama administration however this has since ceased after the change in leadership. Support from different nations also includes countries such as Turkey, Britain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, France, Germany and other Gulf nations. Not all of these nations are still allied with the FSA. There has been debate over the credibility of the FSA as an organization however it still can be seen as the face of the rebel opposition throughout the conflict (Wikipedia).

## Iran and Russia

Since the start of the Syrian Civil War, Iran has been integrally involved in supporting the Syrian government against their opposition and keeping president Assad in power. This support has taken form in a variety of different ways such as the assistance of Iranian security and intelligence agencies, the provision of military support through air transport and Iranian support of pro-government militias in Syria. The Lebanese militia Hezbollah also has direct support from Iran in the conflict. Iran's strategy contains its own self interests in the conflict but has led them to be the most important ally of Syria as well as a large fuel behind the counter influence of the Gulf States and their support for the rebel groups (ISW).

In comparison to the more religious ties between Syria and Iran, Russia's involvement in Syria has a more complex reasoning. Russia has had influence in the Syrian Civil War very early on and has been of significant help for the Syrian government. They have done this through means such as the vetoing of crucial resolutions by the UN security council on the topic of Syria and the sale of significant amounts of Russian arms to the Syrian government and other forces fighting for Assad. The reasoning for their tenacity in the conflict could be for varying reasons. They have stated that the Gulf States are in violation of Syria's sovereign rights through their intervention as well as the fact that they oppose the American led humanitarian missions in Syria. Generally speaking Russia would also be



interested in the cementing of their influence for a post-Assad Syria as well as their own national security in the form of the threat posed by ISIS (Huffington Post).

## Turkey and the Gulf States

Turkey was one of the first nations to condemn the violent actions by the Syrian president against his own people and was one of many nations to demand his resignation as a response for his actions. Even in the beginning of the conflict Turkey had begun training Syrian military defectors within its own borders as well as sheltering the FSA. Similarly to its opposing counterparts Turkey has also supplied arms to the Syrian rebels which it supports in the conflict. The Turkish involvement only expanded as the conflict continued with leaked invasion plans of Syria that were put on YouTube as well as a similar leak occurring in 2015. More recently significant Turkish military operation has been taking place in Afrin, a northern region in Syria, which has caused significant turmoil between the involved parties including the US (Wikipedia). Significant portions of the financial aid presented to the Syrian rebellion in the conflict was arranged by the Gulf States. Countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar offered financial, logistical and political aid from the early stages of the War

## United States of America

American involvement in Syria has not been a direct War waged against the Syrian government. Significant developments in the American approach have been made however with recent events under the Trump administration. This includes the firing of six American tomahawk missiles directly at Syrian government backed forces, the first attack made by the US directly on Syria and not ISIS as was their supposed strategic initiative to lead them into Syria. The US has supported militant groups opposing the Syrian government since the beginning of the conflict, including the FSA. Their support for the FSA has however been concluded after Trump took office. The most significant action that has been taken by the US in the conflict is their air strike campaign against ISIS militants. The US's actions in Syria only

seems to be ramping up under its new administration despite an initially more held back stance being portrayed at the beginning of Trump's term. This also includes the downing of a Syrian air force jet and Iranian drone in 2018 (The National).

## Timeline of Key Events

Timeline of events in reverse chronological order leading up to present day.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description of Event</b>
<b>March 15, 2011</b>	Anti-government protests held in several cities in Syria
<b>March 24, 2011</b>	Dozens of protesters killed after security forces open fire
<b>October 4, 2011</b>	Russia and China veto UN resolution condemning the Syrian government's actions against protestors
<b>July 14, 2012</b>	Committee of the Red Cross declares the conflict as a Civil War
<b>August 21, 2013</b>	Syrian government accused of having used chemical weapons on civilians in Damascus
<b>August 30, 2013</b>	Obama administration declares consideration of military action in Syria
<b>September 14, 2013</b>	US, Russia and Syria reach agreement to place Syrian chemical weapons under international control
<b>January 22, 2014</b>	Geneva II is held but no progress is made
<b>June 30, 2014</b>	ISIS declares itself a caliphate
<b>September 23, 2014</b>	American and Arab coalition expand air campaign against Syria, ISIS and Iraq
<b>September 30, 2015</b>	First airstrikes carried out by Russia in Syria



**December 22, 2016** Syrian government declares victory in Aleppo after last rebel fighters evacuate

## Relevant UN Resolutions

- Establishment of United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS), 21 April 2012 (S/RES/2043)
- Resolution requiring the verification and destruction of Syria's chemical weapon stockpiles, 27 September 2013 (S/RES/2118)
- Resolution demanding all parties to allow humanitarian aid across conflict lines, 22 February 2014 (S/RES/2139)
- Resolution imposing obligation for member states to respond to the threat of foreign terrorist fighters, 24 September 2014 (S/RES/2178)
- Condemned the use of toxic chemicals such as chlorine and pointed out that those responsible should be held accountable, 6 March 2015 (S/RES/2209)
- Calls on member states to take all necessary action on the territory held by ISIS, 20 November 2015 (S/RES/2249)
- Unanimously adopted resolution demanding a cessation of hostilities in Syria, 24 February 2018 (**S/RES/2401**)

## Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

One of the most notable attempts at solving the conflict in Syria has been the several Geneva conferences that have taken place, bringing together the UN and involved nations to discuss on resolving the issue. The first of which, commonly known as Geneva I, took place in June of 2012. Notably for Geneva II was the pressure to implement the Geneva communique (See Appendix B) on the situation in Syria which was created in the predating conference (Wikipedia). However, the talks had collapsed during the conference as the deadlock could not be broken between the Syrian government and their opposition. The same went for Geneva III and IV in 2016 with the Syrian opposition even walking out in the conference's fourth installment. The count currently stands at VII but no significant breakthrough can be seen in the talks on resolving the issue (Aljazeera).

Other attempts at resolution include the Astana talks between Russia, Turkey and Iran creating dialogue between the three nations as well as the enforcement of a ceasefire which took place in the first installment of the conference. A peace plan was proposed by Assad in 2013 however the Syrian opposition rejected this (Aljazeera). As listed above there have been several UN resolutions on the topic however their success has been limited with often times resolutions being vetoed by countries such as Russia and China who disagree with possible increase in western involvement in the issue. This western involvement in itself is an attempt at solving the issue with for instance the American air campaign being intended to halt the uprising of forces such as ISIS. The success of this has naturally been quite limited as can be seen in the total lack of a political agreement in the issue.



## Possible Solutions

When looking at resolutions on the issue different priorities can be taken in terms of what aspect of the conflict is considered to be the most urgent to solve. These aspects include humanitarian concerns, civilian protection, the Syrian economy, political state, infrastructure and others. One of the aspects that should be taken into consideration is the humanitarian aid required for the civilians of Syria. Specifically, in the city of Aleppo, airdrop aid for the citizens still remaining there is a necessity in order to provide them with sufficient aid. This initiative is supported by a large number of British MPs as well as Syrian humanitarian aid workers. It is also stated under international law and a UN resolution that in the case of non-compliance aid must reach the people in the most direct way possible thus legally binding member states to this call for help (Independent).

Not only humanitarian aid is crucial for the Syrian citizens but also protection. Syrian civilians have been killed in the hundreds of thousands through attacks by government troops and endless shelling on civilian homes. Many consider the implementation of no-bomb zones to be a viable solution to providing more safety and security for the Syrian people who remain in their own country (Independent).



What has also already been taken into account but could be further elaborated on during the upcoming conference is the legal prosecution of crimes against humanity that have taken place over the span of the conflict. This can be done through international organizations such as the ICC. It is crucial that this case is opened now and evidence is collected to support said case in order to appoint blame and appropriate punishment, not only to the Syrian government and Assad but also the evident war crimes committed by other nations such as Russia. Naturally the collection of evidence would require on the ground representatives which would have to be implemented through UN resolution to allow them to pass conflict lines (Independent). This solution could face difficulty, however, in the previously seen lack of collaboration between nations and international organizations.

As stated earlier in this report the Syrian refugees have been a staple point issue that has arisen out of the conflict and one that has been on the international stage for a while now. Clauses need to be included in the upcoming conference that address how these refugees will be divided amongst nations currently willing to accept them, how these refugees can safely be brought to different countries and how they can most efficiently begin their lives in those new places. What might also need to be addressed is what will be done with countries currently unwilling to accept refugees and how this affects the balance between intake.

The actual military issue as well as political conversation between involved nations needs to be addressed. How will the tactical approach towards the War and fighting off forces such as the Syrian government and its international backers or the remains of extremist fighting groups such as ISIS be undertaken. Also how the dialogue between nations will become more efficient so as to avoid the lack of action being undertaken from conferences such as in Geneva that lead to no results for de-escalating the conflict.





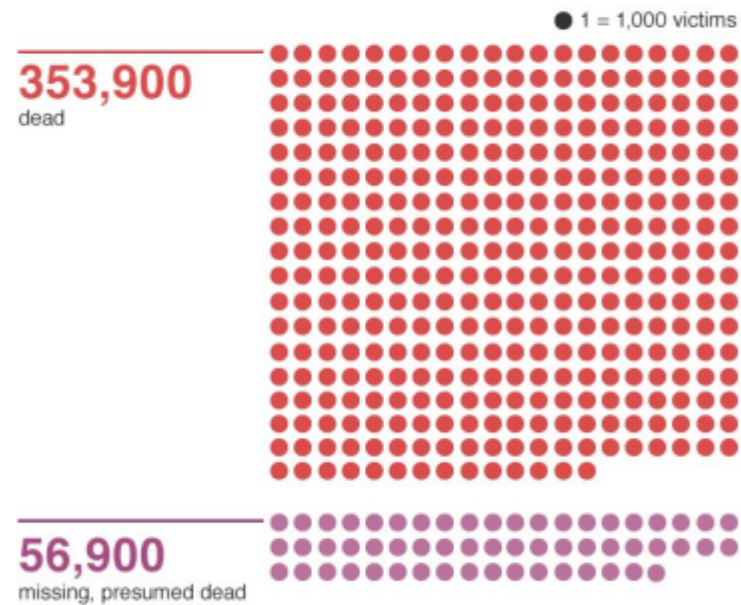
## Appendices

### Appendix I

#### Visual Representation of the loss of life in the Syrian Civil War

**More than 400,000 people have been killed or are missing**

Exact death toll figures vary depending on the source



Source: Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, March 2018

BBC

### Appendix II

#### Geneva Communiqué

<http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Syria/FinalCommuniqueActionGroupforSyria.pdf>

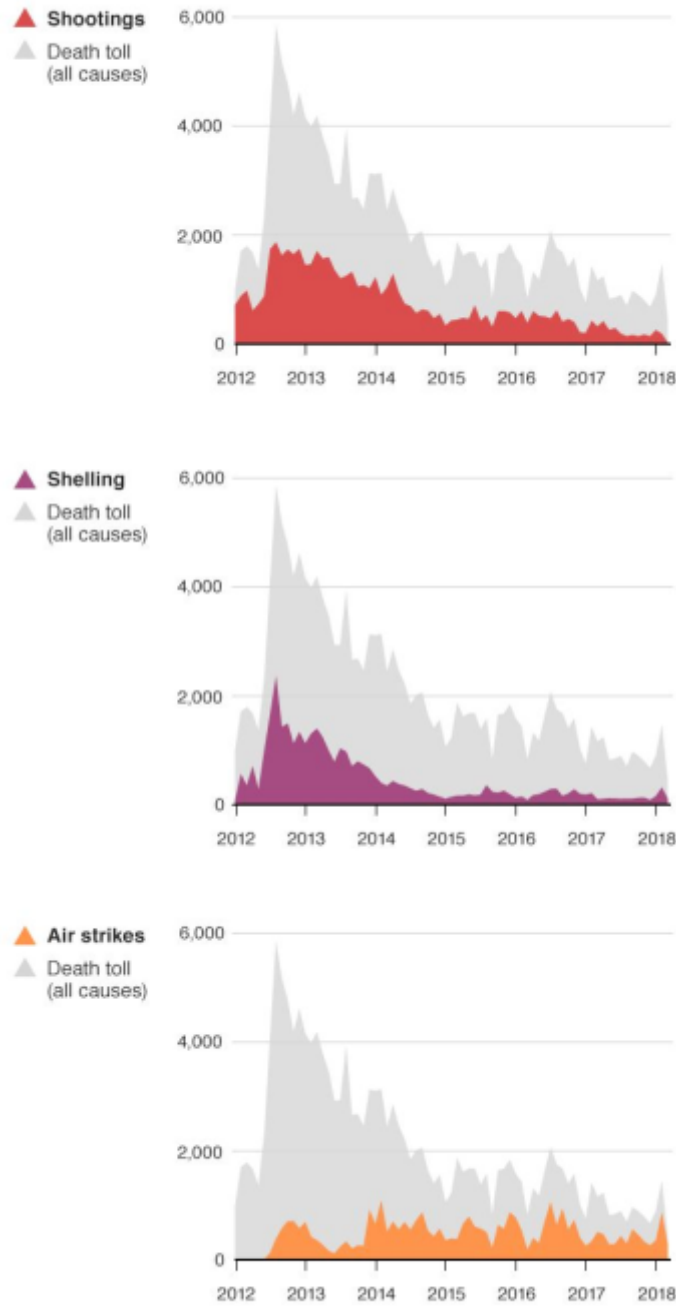
### Appendix III

Graphs depicting the most common cause of death in different stages of the war.



### The three stages of Syria's war

Shootings, initially the most common cause of death, were replaced by mortar attacks during the conflict's bloodiest period in 2012, followed by regime-led aerial strikes.



Source: Violations Documentation Center tracking deaths that constitute human rights violations **BBC**

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