

HISAR SCHOOL

JUNIOR MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2018

“Globalization: Creating a Common Language”

Political Committee

Formulating a Diplomatic Corridor Between Syria-Based Powers that are in Territorial Dispute



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REPORT**

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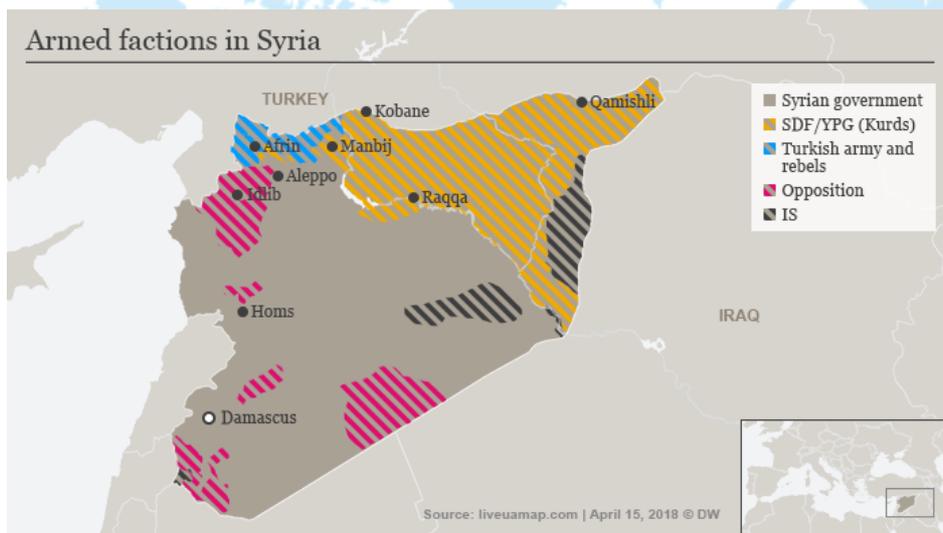
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Forum: Political Committee

Issue: Formulating A Diplomatic Corridor Between Syria-based Powers That Are In Territorial Dispute

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Introduction

The conflict in Syria began as an offshoot of the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings. Sparked on April 29th in the town of Daraa by a group of 13 year old boys who wrote on the side of their school "The Government must go!", the movement began as a uprising for democracy. But in the past five years, it has since disintegrated into a cauldron of competing rebel groups, terrorist elements, international powers, and religious factions--all with millions of Syrians killed and more millions displaced.

Syria's conflict landscape has changed dramatically since the Russian military intervened in 2015, with most major territory controlled by armed groups falling under the control of regime-aligned forces. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS) has been severely depleted, while the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have assumed control of more territory, increasing the possibility of Kurdish autonomy.

Meanwhile, the Astana process has imposed new realities on Syria's armed opposition, as the tripartite talks between Russia, Turkey and Iran produced an agreement on de-escalation zones.

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Definition of Key Terms

Territorial Dispute: a disagreement about who controls a particular territory

Rebel group: is defined as a political group that uses armed conflict in opposition to established government or governments for reasons such as to seek political change or to establish or maintain or to gain independence

Syria Based Powers

Hay'et Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)

HTS is Jabhat al-Nusra's successor and comprises some of the more powerful armed groups operating in Idlib province.

After 2015, agreements between regime and opposition forces led to the forced displacement of fighters and many civilians from conflict zones, pushing them into Idlib. The situation has created intense competition and infighting, along with a dizzying number of alliances and counter-alliances among the various armed groups.

HTS emerged out of this competition as one of the stronger groups in Idlib.

The Free Syrian Army (FSA)

The Free Syrian Army is the army that never was one.

Since the outset of the conflict, the FSA has been a conglomeration of armed brigades fighting under a loose umbrella in which central coordination and military planning never existed. FSA brigades have shifted alliances to other armed opposition groups, as well as re-defecting to the Syrian army.

There is thus virtually no ideological, political or military coherence, but the FSA persists as a loose organisational mechanism for armed groups.

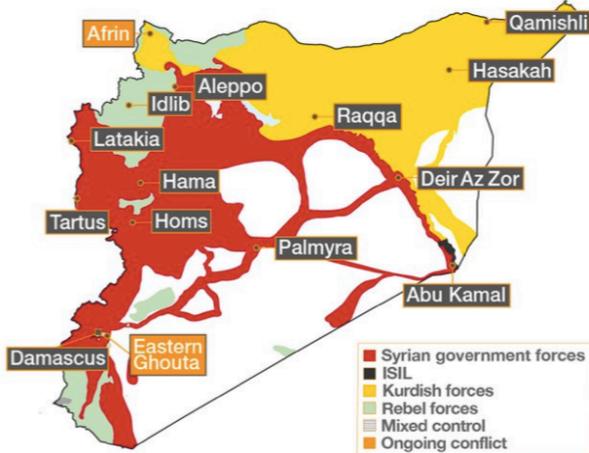
The Unified National Army (UNA)

The Unified National Army was created in mid-2017 with the aim of bringing together armed groups of various ideological and political backgrounds. Many of these groups are dispersed throughout Syrian territory in areas where there is still active fighting, such as the south, Ghouta and northern areas around Aleppo and Idlib.

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While some of the southern factions retain control over some territory, their increasing abandonment by Jordanian authorities has limited their capacity and access to resources. Thus, despite having the appearance of a national character with brigades from all over the country pledging support for the project, the UNA has not solved the problems of coordination and material resources that have plagued previous attempts at unifying Syria's armed groups.

Syria: Who controls what?



General Overview

The unrest in Syria was started alongside a string of revolutions in the middle east, known as the Arab Spring. Unrest in Syria began when residents in the small Syrian town of Dara'a, took to the streets to protest the torture of young boys, who put up anti-government graffiti on their school building. President Assad responded with heavy-handed force, causing demonstrations to quickly spread across the country.

Up to this point in March 2011, President Bashar al-Assad had been ruling over the Syrian people with an iron fist. After the initial protest in March 2011, President Assad started to crackdown on the demonstrations across the country. In April 2011, he began to send tanks into cities and having regime forces open fire on civilians.

As the opposition grew stronger, the United Nations warned Syria was on the verge of a civil war and called for immediate action.

Ethical divisions in Syria also play a pivotal role in the conflict. The Assad family, and much of the nation's elite, especially the military, belong to the Alawite sect, a minority in a mostly Sunni country. While the Assad government has the advantage of crushing firepower and units of loyal, elite troops, the insurgents should not be underestimated. They are highly motivated and, over time, demographics should tip in their favor. Alawites constitute about 12 percent of the 23 million Syrians. Sunni Muslims, the opposition's backbone, make up about 75 percent of the population.

In August 2011, the Syrian National Council (SNC) was formed to fight the Syrian government. Their goal was to end President Assad's rule and establish a modern democratic state. Unfortunately

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the opposition was a fractious collection of political groups, longtime exiles, grass-roots organizers and armed militants, divided along ideological, ethnic or sectarian lines.

By February 2012, the United Nation and the Security Council tried to pass resolution condemning President Assad's attack on his civilians. However, countries like Russia and China blocked all efforts.

With Russia and China blocking Security Council efforts to stop human rights violations in Syria, the death toll in Syria began to rapidly rise from the previous year. From 400 deaths in June 2011 to more than 3,000 in June 2012. At this point, the UN estimates that over 10,000 have died and thousands more displaced by the fighting.

In cities throughout Syria, including the capital, Damascus, and the largest city, Aleppo, the opposition had coalesced around armed groups identifying themselves as elements of the Free Syrian Army.

As the conflict would continue with no end in sight, things have become more complicated than ever. The introduction of Muslim Jihadists, Al Qaeda and world super powers would quickly escalate the killing and destruction in Syria.

Largest Ethnic Groups In Syria

Arabs comprise around three-quarters of the Syrian population, while Kurds, Turkmen, and Assyrians are the most significant minorities.

Part of the reason why the conflict in Syria is so complicated is because of the huge diversity of ethnic and religious groups living there. The rivalries and tensions between these peoples play an important role in the war and help explain what is going on.

Rank	Ethnic Group	Share of Syrian Population
1	Arabs	74.0%
2	Kurdish and/or Yazidi	9.5%
3	Turkmen	4.5%
4	Assyrian	3.5%
5	Circassian	1.5%
6	Armenian	1.0%
	Other Groups of People	6.0%

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Sunni Muslims

The biggest ethnic/religious group in Syria are the Sunni Muslim Arabs, making up **around 70% of the country's population**. Sunni Islam is most popular sect of Islam in the world, and is being supported and spread mostly by Saudi Arabian efforts.

The Sunni Arabs in Syria are the biggest supporters of the rebel forces, and in recent years have developed increasingly hostile feelings towards the Shia Muslim Assad government. They have always been the majority in a country that is lead by the minority.

Shia Muslims / Alawites

Shia Islam is the second big sect of after Sunni Islam, to which **about 12% of Syrians** adhere to. The majority of these followers are Alawites, as is President Assad. Although the Alawites are a minority in the country, they **have held control over almost all aspects of the government since 1971** when the father of Bashar al-Assad took power. The Shiites around the world are mainly supported and funded by Iran, as a counterweight to Saudi Arabia. The Shiites are seen as heretics by many Sunni Islamists, and as such almost all Shias in Syria support the Assad regime, as they (somewhat justifiably) fear a massacre or even a genocide in revenge should the Sunni groups come to power.

Kurds

The Kurds are a separate ethnic group in Syria and Iraq making up somewhere between 7-10% of Syria's population. They have long sought autonomy, if not independence and the Syrian civil war provided an opportunity to finally make those dreams true.

Turkmen

The Syrian Turkmen are essentially ethnic Turks who have lived in the region since around the 11th century. **Only making up around 1% of the population**. The main groups have positioned themselves against Assad and ISIS.

Assyrians

The Assyrians are descendants of one of the oldest civilizations in the world, and see themselves as the original natives of the land they inhabit. They make up around **4% of the population**. The armed groups are quite bafflingly named, as the pro-government one is known as Sootoro, while the pro-Opposition/Kurd one is known as Sutoro.

Druze

The Druze are followers of an 10th century off-shoot of Shia Islam. **They make up around 3% of the population**. They are vehemently opposed to being conscripted to the Assad forces, often countering with weapons and sometimes even breaking Druze who refused to serve out of prison.

Major Parties Involved

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Iran

Tehran has been one of Assad's strongest backers, supporting loyalist forces with money, weapons and intelligence. Iran has also sent military advisers from its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to Syria and directed fighters from Hezbollah, a Lebanon-based militant group backed by Iran, which is also involved in the conflict. It has also organized paramilitary militia from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq to fight for the Assad regime. Iran has set up multiple bases in Syria, raising concern in Israel that Tehran plans to stay in Syria for the long haul.

Iran and Syria had a mutual defense pact before the onset of the Syria civil war in 2011. Iran has sought to bolster the Assad regime in its fight against various rebel factions, many of which are backed Tehran's regional rivals such as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. Iran, which also backs Shiite militia in Iraq fighting the "Islamic State," views the Syrian war as a frontline against Sunni militant groups and as a means to expand its regional influence. The Assad regime allows Iranian aid to flow to Hezbollah, a major regional military power and enemy of Israel.

Russia

Moscow came to Assad's aid in late 2015, deploying hundreds of troops and acting as the regime's air force. Russian officials say it targets terrorist organizations like "Islamic State" (IS). But Russian bombers have also struck other anti-Assad groups, turning the tide of the war in the regime's favor. As a veto-wielding UN Security Council member, Russia has also provided the Syrian regime diplomatic cover. Alongside Iran and Turkey, Moscow has sought to find a political end to the conflict parallel to UN talks in Geneva.

Moscow wants to secure its influence in the Middle East by keeping Assad in office and maintaining an important military air base in the western province of Latakia and a naval base in the port city of Tartus. Russian President Vladimir Putin also appears to want to bolster Russian prestige and influence in the Middle East at the expense of the United States, which it blames for creating instability.

Saudi Arabia

Riyadh has given money and weapons to Syrian opposition forces, including some Islamist militant groups such as the Army of Islam. It has also played a limited role in US-led international coalition against IS.

Saudi Arabia, a majority Sunni country, opposes Iran's attempts to expand its influence in the Middle East. Riyadh wants to replace Assad with a pro-Saudi, anti-Iranian leader.

Turkey

Turkey had a good relationship with Syria in the mid-2000s. Since the outbreak of the civil war, Turkey has supported non-Kurdish Syrian opposition groups seeking to topple Assad. Turkey has allowed opposition fighters, including jihadist militants, to enter the fray across the Turkish-Syrian border. The Turkish military and its rebel allies have conducted two operations in northern Syria against the Kurds and carved out a zone of influence.

Turkey originally sought to topple the Assad regime by backing various rebel groups. After Russia intervened in Syria in 2015, Turkey has focused more on preventing Syrian Kurds from gaining autonomy in northern Syria. Some 3 million Syrian refugees are in Turkey and Ankara seeks to prevent new refugee flows and carve out safe zones in northern Syria to house refugees.

Israel

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Israel has launched airstrikes against the Lebanese Shiite militia Hezbollah and Iranian targets in Syria, especially suspected weapons shipments and bases. It has also backed several smaller rebel groups and Druze along the border in the Golan Heights to create a buffer zone.

Israel wants to prevent Iran from developing a political and military presence on its northern doorstep. Israel also wants to rollback Hezbollah in Syria in order to prevent it from forming a wider northern front, alongside its main backer Iran.

United States

The US has led an international coalition fighting IS with airstrikes and special forces since 2014. It has also provided air support and weapons to opposition groups in northern Syria, including Kurdish forces opposed to Turkey, a US ally in NATO. Washington has also deployed about 2000 special forces to fight alongside the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a mixed Kurdish and Arab force in control of about 25 percent of Syrian territory.

Washington's foremost stated goal has been the destruction of IS and other extremist groups in Syria. US policy toward Assad is less clear. Trump's predecessor, Barack Obama, said "Assad must go." Apart from its opposition to the Syrian government's use of chemical weapons, the Trump administration's position on Assad's future is more ambiguous. The US also seeks to rollback Iranian influence in Syria.

Germany

Germany has flown surveillance flights over Syrian territory to support airstrikes against IS. Berlin has also called on Russia and Iran to persuade Assad to leave office in any peace deal. Germany is a major funder of humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees.

France

France initially sent medical supplies and weapons to opposition forces. In 2015, it began airstrikes against IS that intensified after an IS terror attack in Paris in November 2015. French special forces are deployed on the ground alongside US special forces backing the SDF. Paris has also warned Assad against using chemical weapons.

Paris wants to defeat IS after a string of IS-related terrorist attacks in France. French President Emmanuel Macron said in 2017 his country would no longer condition peace talks on a promise by Assad to leave office.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Peace negotiations have been ongoing between the Syrian government and the opposition in order to achieve a military ceasefire and political transition in Syria, but the main sticking point has been the fate of Assad.

- **Geneva:** The first round of UN-facilitated talks between the Syrian government and opposition delegates took place in Geneva, Switzerland in June 2012.
- The latest round of talks in December 2017 failed amid a tit-for-tat between the Syrian government and opposition delegates over statements about the future role of Assad in a transitional government.
- In 2014 Staffan de Mistura replaced Kofi Annan as the UN special envoy for Syria.

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- **Astana:** In May 2017, Russia, Iran and Turkey called for the setup of four de-escalation zones in Syria, over which Syrian and Russian fighter jets were not expected to fly.
- After denouncing plans to partition Syria in March 2018, a follow-up trilateral summit was held in Turkey to discuss the way forward.
- **Sochi:** In January 2018, Russia sponsored talks over the future of Syria in the Black Sea city of Sochi, but the opposition bloc boycotted the conference, claiming it was an attempt to undercut the UN effort to broker a deal.

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