

Princeton Interactive
Crisis Simulation



Syria

February 19-22nd 2015

@Princeton University

History

Syria, formally the Syrian Arab Republic, was established after World War I as a French mandate, and later proceeded to gain independence in 1946 as a parliamentary republic. This post-independence period was characterized by tumultuous revolts and numerous military coups. Between 1958 and 1962, Syria entered into a union with Egypt, which later on broke down because of a military coup. After the Ba'athist coup d'état, the Republic of Syria transformed into the Arab Republic of Syria. Between 1963 and 2011, Syria was officially under Emergency Law, thereby suspending constitutional protections for citizens and establishing a coercive regime. Bashar al-Assad has been president since 2000 and was preceded by his father Hafez al-Assad, who was in office from 1970 to 2000. As part of the Arab Spring, unrest erupted in the country and what is known as the ongoing Syrian Civil War took place. As the government responded with violent measures, the conflict grew from popular protests to a full-armed rebellion.

Geography

At the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, Syria is bordered by Lebanon and Israel on the west, Turkey on the north, Iraq on the east, and Jordan on the south. Coastal Syria is a narrow plain with range of coastal mountains in the west, and still farther inland a steppe area. In the east is the Syrian Desert and in the south is the Jebel Druze Range.¹ Syria is divided into fourteen governorates. The governorates are divided into a total of sixty districts, which are further divided into sub-districts. Damascus, the capital, is the second largest city in Syria, and the metropolitan area is governorate on its own.²



¹ Syria: Maps, History, Geography, Government, Culture, Facts, Guide & Travel/Holidays/Cities <http://www.infoplease.com/country/syria.html#ixzz3QYw4j0wu>

² <http://geography.about.com/library/cia/blcsyria.htm>

Type of Government

Syria is considered an unitary republic under an authoritarian regime. After adapting the constitution in 2012, Syria became a semi-presidential republic since individuals who are not a part of the National Progressive Front were no longer disqualified from running for president. Although the constitution does require the president-elect to be Muslim, it does not impose Islam as the national religion. According to this document, the president is elected by Syrian citizens in a direct election. While the President is the Head of State, the Prime Minister is the Head of the Government. The legislative branch, the People's Council, is responsible for passing laws, approving government appropriations and debating national policy. The executive branch consists of the president, two vice presidents, the prime minister, and the Council of Ministers (the cabinet). On 7 May 2012, elections were held in which parties outside the ruling coalition could participate; seven new parties ran in this election, with the Popular Front of Change and Liberation as the largest opposition party. However, armed anti-government forces decided to not send a candidate and called for a general boycott of the elections. Currently, the President is the leader of the National Progressive Front, the governing coalition.

Demographics

While Syria's population is currently 22,087,048 (April 2014)³, this number is rapidly decreasing. It is estimated that 5,000 Syrians flee the country each day. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 28% of the country's population has now been driven out of their homes; 2 million have fled outside of the country, and 4.25 million have been displaced but remained in the country.⁴ Several ethnic groups compose this general population – 90.3% are of Arab ethnicity, while the remaining 9.7% are Kurds, Armenians, or other. Syria has an overwhelming Muslim majority, 87% of the population, composed of 74% Sunni and 13% Shia. The country also harbors about 10% of a Christian population and a decreasing Jewish population in Damascus and Aleppo.⁵

United States and Syria

Historical Relations

The first trace of relations between the United States and Syria dates back to 1835 when U.S. consuls were appointed to establish diplomatic ties with the Ottoman Empire, which encompassed the land that is now Syria. However, diplomatic relations between the modern state of Syria and United States were established first in 1944 after the U.S. determined that Syria had gained effective independence from the French administered mandate whose control of Syria had begun in 1920.⁶ By 1949, the United States was already getting involved in the affairs of the newborn independent nation by setting up a "Political Action Team" in Syria and supporting General Husni al-Za'im's coup d'état after he approached the U.S. embassy in Damascus with the purpose.⁷

Due to the following instability in the country's government, it was not until 1954 that Syria could revert to a parliamentary form of government, which in turn resulted in the

³ <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/syria-population/>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ http://www.indexmundi.com/syria/demographics_profile.html

⁶ <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3580.htm>

⁷ Moubayed, Sami M. "The U.S. and Husni Al Za'im." *Syria and the USA: Washington's Relations with Damascus from Wilson to Eisenhower*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2012. 77-78. Print.

friendship and economic assistance of the Soviet Union rather than the United States. In the tense years of the Cold War, this was an obvious decline in U.S.-Syria Relations. Nevertheless, the ties between Syria and U.S. took an even worse turn when the CIA tried to cause a transition of power through 'Operation Straggle' in 1956, which involved military activity on the border to inspire a coup⁸ and Operation Wappen in 1957-1958,⁹ which aimed at bribing the Syrian military officials to overthrow Syrian President Adib Shishakli. These attempts failed to cause a transition of power favorable to elements in the U.S. intelligence. Moreover, after this failed coup attempt and as a result of the Suez Crisis of 1956, the U.S. invoked the Eisenhower Doctrine and involved itself militarily in Lebanon.¹⁰ It started asserting itself in the Middle East with an anti-Nasserist stance in an attempt to contain the rising Arab nationalism and prevent it from tilting towards Soviet influence.¹¹ U.S.-Syrian relations remain highly tense from 1958 to 1967, even as Nasser's idea of a united Arab nation took concrete form. The conflicts and instability created by the Arab-Israeli conflict did not help U.S.-Syria relations, as there was a public awareness of U.S. support for Israel.

U.S.-Syria relations worsened in 1967 when Syria severed all diplomatic ties with the United States as a result of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, also termed the 'Six Days War,' on the pretext of U.S. support to Israel, despite no record of any direct military support offered by the U.S. to Israel for this war. This was followed by a void of any relations between the two nations for 7 years.

In 1973, another conflict between Israel and the Arab nations (primarily Egypt and Syria) called the Yom Kippur War led to the eventual ceasefire and agreement between Syria and Israel termed as 'The Agreement on Disengagement' of 1974. Relations between the United States and Syria also resumed in 1974.¹² However, this resumption in ties did not mean an improvement of U.S.-Syria relations, as the U.S.'s official stance remained (and still remains) that Syria has been a primary haven for terrorist activities in the Middle East, including harboring Saddam Hussein loyalists.¹³ However in the 1990 Gulf War, Hafez Al Assad's Syrian government supported the U.S. against Iraq as a part of the Gulf Coalition,¹⁴ which led to a brief respite in the tense relations between the two nations. In fact, diplomatic ties between the two nations improved considerably between 1990 and 2000 when Syria was under Hafez Al Assad's regime and to some extent even under Bashar Al Assad in the 21st century. However, the turn of the century has brought dire economic sanctions on Syria, put forth by the United States as a result of the Syrian involvement in attempts at infringing on Lebanon's sovereignty and the alleged support and harboring of terrorist groups by Bashar Al Assad's government.

Current Relations between the Syrian Government and United States

Even though relations improved between the U.S. and Syria after the Gulf War, the 2005 Syrian involvement in Lebanon and the various terrorist groups operating from within Syrian

⁸ <http://www.us-foreign-policy-perspective.org/index.php?id=328>

⁹ http://coat.ncf.ca/our_magazine/links/issue51/articles/51_12-13.pdf

¹⁰ <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/eisenhower-doctrine>

¹¹ <http://andrewgavinmarshall.com/2012/03/05/fighting-the-rising-tide-of-arab-nationalism-the-eisenhower-doctrine-and-the-syrian-crisis/>

¹² <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/undof/>

¹³ <http://www.cfr.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/middle-east-us-syrian-relations/p7852>

¹⁴ http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1991-03-12/news/9101220963_1_syria-president-hafez-assad-peacekeeping-force

borders (including Al Qaeda and some offshoots of ISIL at this point of time) have necessitated U.S. economic sanctions on Syria which have categorized U.S.-Syria ties as nothing less than strained]. These sanctions include Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty restoration act of May 2004 and other Sanctions on Syrian banks (imposed in 2006) and certain individuals. In fact in September 2014, U.S. has expanded its war on terror against ISIL to Syria through direct military action and missile strikes,¹⁵ which marks the beginning of another chapter in the tumultuous relations between the two nations.

Current Relations between the Syrian National Coalition and United States

This Council along with other major opponents of Bashar Al Assad's regime formed The National Council for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (or the Syrian National Coalition) in November 2012, as an umbrella organization to oppose Assad's rule. The Syrian National Coalition has been recognized as the "legitimate representative"¹⁶ of the Syrian people by the United States.

Formation and Role in the Revolution

Major opposition groups already active in the conflict formed the Syrian National Coalition on Nov. 11th 2012 in Doha, Qatar.¹⁷ Most notable among these groups are the Syrian National Council (SNC), who were the most visible leaders of the opposition, the Free Syrian Army (FSA), who are the opposition umbrella military group, the Islamist Group the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, and the Coalition of Secular and Democratic Syrians. These groups still exist under the National Coalition's banner and send representatives to sit on the Coalition's 114 seats. The Coalition is currently headquartered in Istanbul, Turkey.

In its position as one of the most visible and widely supported of the groups committed to the removal of the Assad regime in Syria, the National Coalition has come to fill the role of an interim government in exile, both organizing and mobilizing Syrians against the regime domestically, and garnering support for the opposition cause internationally. Shortly after the group's formation, many Arab and a number of Western governments including France, Britain, and eventually the United States recognized it to be 'the (sole) legitimate representative of the Syrian people' and have since engaged the Coalition in diplomatic relations¹⁸. The National Coalition also sends representatives for Syria to the Arab League. Though the National Coalition has received aid from the U.S. in the past, concerns about weapons falling into the hands of jihadists and the U.S.'s failure to fulfill promised air strikes against the regime following the discovery of chemical weapons use by government forces has seriously undermined the National Coalition's ability to unite opposition groups within Syria or gain further support from other foreign governments.

¹⁵ <http://www.mintpressnews.com/us-expands-global-war-terror-striking-isis-targets-syria/196871/>

¹⁶ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-20319787>

¹⁷ "Syria Profile." *BBC News*. BBC, 16 Sept. 2014. Web. 01 Feb. 2015.

¹⁸ "About the Syrian Coalition in the US." *National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces*. National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, n.d. Web. 01 Feb. 2015.

The National Coalition also serves as the main representative of the opposition in any peace talks between it and the Assad regime. Without representatives from the National Coalition, any peace talks are likely to fail, as seen in the Russian-moderated peace conference between opposition groups and the Assad regime in Moscow in early 2015. Boycotted by the National Coalition, the talks only resulted in the agreement between the smaller opposition groups in attendance and the Assad regime to meet again at an unspecified future date¹⁹. Meanwhile, the National Coalition decision to attend another round of UN sponsored talks with Western governments and the Assad regime in Geneva has led to discontent and division within the coalition, and the succession of the Syrian National Council, the Coalition's largest and most historically legitimate founding member.

Overview of the Syrian Opposition and the National Coalition's Role

Other than the Syrian National Coalition and the affiliated generally secular opposition groups under it, the Syrian opposition also includes Islamist opposition groups seeking to establish an Islamic state or 'caliphate' in parts or all of Syria, Kurdish opposition groups fighting for greater autonomy in ethnic Kurdish regions, and other secular opposition groups fighting for regime change that were never or are no longer associated with the National Coalition.

Among the Islamist groups currently operating in opposition to the Assad regime, the most significant are the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), al-Nusra Front (ANF), which is an al-Qaeda affiliate condemned by western governments as a terrorist organization, and the Islamic Front, a group heavily supported by Saudi Arabia with the stated intent of the establishment of an Islamic state in Syria (no affiliation with ISIL). These groups generally shun the Syrian National Coalition as lacking sufficient deference to Islamic law and as being too easily manipulated by foreign powers, such as Qatar and Turkey.

Kurdish opposition groups representing the separate goal of greater Kurdish autonomy are organized into two main parties: the Kurdish National Council (KNC) and the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (DYP). Founded in 2003, the DYP has "close connections" with the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), a group listed by the U.S., EU and NATO as a terrorist organization. However, the DYP says the PKK has agreed to not interfere with the affairs of Syrian Kurds in the context of Syria's civil war. Meanwhile, the KNC was formed in 2011 following the formation of the Syrian National Council with the stated goal of securing a federalist style of government for Syria and by extension greater autonomy for Kurdish regions. Together the two send representatives to the Kurdish Supreme Committee, the body responsible for mediating between the two groups. While the KNC is a part of the National Coalition, the DYP is not, claiming that without the approval and urging of the Supreme Committee, it will not join.²⁰

The DYP has recently been involved with heavy fighting with ISIL in eastern Syria near the Turkish border. Though the Kurdish opposition groups generally agree with the goals of the National Coalition, the Coalition rejects Kurdish calls for a federalist form of government in a post-Assad Syria.

Finally, scores of other secular opposition groups not affiliated with the National Coalition dot the opposition field. The most significant of these is the Syrian National Council (SNC), which broke with the National Coalition in January 2015 following the Coalition's decision to attend another round of peace talks in Geneva. Though no longer a part of the

¹⁹ Baczynska, Gabriela. "Moscow-hosted Syria Talks End, Sides Agree on Little." *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters, 29 Jan. 2015. Web. 01 Feb. 2015.

²⁰ Hemeidi, Ibrahim. "Syria's Kurds Formally Join Opposition Coalition." *Al-Monitor*. Al-Hayat, 28 Aug. 2013. Web. 01 Feb. 2015.

National Coalition, the SNC still sends representatives to the group. While the SNC was originally a significant group in organizing and uniting the opposition before the formation of the Coalition, it remains to be seen how the group will work to achieve its goals in cooperation with the Coalition following their recent separation.

Internal Dissent in the SNC

The Syrian National Coalition has seen some internal dissent in the past. This dissent is primarily characterized by the conflict between the civil/political and military elements of the Syrian National Coalition. For instance, in June 2014 Ahmed Tomeh, the leader of the SNC's opposition shadow government against Bashar Al Assad's government, announced the restructuring of the SNC's military wing which - included terminating the services of a top General. This prompted members of the coalition to question Tomeh's authority to issue such an order. Internal dissent is also visible in the form of factionalism within the coalition with different outside forces, including other Arab countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar.²¹ These internal rivalries and conflicts of the SNC have created several setbacks for the coalition in its short history of existence.

Geneva I and Geneva II Talks

On 30 June 2012, the Secretaries-General of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, the Foreign Ministers of China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States, Turkey, Iraq, Kuwait, and Qatar, and the European Union High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy met at the United Nations Office at Geneva²² and drafted a plan for a political settlement between the Syrian government and Syrian Opposition. This meeting was called the Geneva I Conference on Syria and later, along with a few other factors, paved the way to the Geneva II conference on Syria.

In May 2013, after about 100,000 lives had been lost in Syria and about 9.5 million people displaced, both the United States and Russia came to an agreement on trying to “bring both sides to the table” in the conflict. The efforts to make such a meeting between the Syrian government and the Syrian opposition possible gained momentum when a chemical bomb explosion caused hundreds of deaths near Damascus on 21 August 2013.²³ The United Nations General assembly adopted resolution 2118 and called for the destruction of the Syrian chemical weapon stockpile as well as the “convening, as soon as possible, of an international conference on Syria to implement the Geneva Communiqué.”²⁴ This further led to the Geneva II conference, which began on 22 January 2014 in Montreux, Switzerland and then continued from January 23rd to January 31st in Geneva.

A second round of talks was held from February 10th to 15th 2014. The Conference involved both the Syrian government and Syrian opposition (primarily the Syrian National Coalition), although the Syrian National Council left the Syrian National Coalition due to the Coalition's decision to attend the talks. It also involved the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the European Union and 39 other nations. The talks almost collapsed before they began as the SNC backed out due to the invitation sent to Iran on 19 January 2014

²¹ <http://touch.latimes.com/#section/-1/article/p2p-80662111/>

²² <http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Syria/FinalCommuniqueActionGroupforSyria.pdf>

²³ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24628442>

²⁴ <http://www.un.org/press/en/2013/sc11135.doc.htm>

and its acceptance by Tehran. None of the talks in the Geneva II conference have yielded any tangible results towards resolving or even ceasing the Syrian conflict thus far.

Delegations

Moaz al-Khatib is the president of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. Considered a “man of the people,” Moaz is a well-respected member of the Syrian opposition forces and the Local Council of Damascus. Although he has been described as a moderate Islamist, several papers written by Moaz have emerged revealing anti-Semitic sentiments and some degree of animosity toward the West. Finally, as a lively member of the Sunni community, he has publicly called out Shi’ites as “rejectionists” and has a deep mistrust for them.

Riad Seif was elected Vice President of the new opposition government on 11 November 2012. Although originally a successful businessman, he was forced out of business after publicly calling out a deal in parliament for a cellular telephone system, the contract for which would be given to the family of Hafez al-Assad, which would cost Syria millions of dollars. As a result, he was imprisoned several times until his election as vice president. His background should drive his market-based solutions during committee.

Suheir al-Atassi was the co-Vice President of the opposition government who resigned in December 2013 after a scandal involving aid money. As the Vice President of the Head of Humanitarian Support Unit, al-Atassi has been actively involved in promoting human rights. Recognized as the “Lady of the Revolution,” she was imprisoned after publicly decrying the oppressive regime.

Mustafa al-Sabbagh, the secretary-general of the Syrian National Coalition, is an active member of the Syrian Business Forum. Al-Sabbagh has been characterized by his focus on building institutions that are capable of managing the revolution and the transitional stage in an organized fashion.

Haitham al-Maleh is a member of the Council of Revolutionary Syrian Trustees. As a critic of the current government, al-Maleh has been imprisoned several times. According to an interview with “The Daily Telegraph,” Maleh stated that the situation in Syria is no longer able to be resolved through peaceful means and predicted that "Assad and his family will be killed in Syria, their next steps will be very bloody ... The end for him will be that he is killed like Gaddafi.”

Mouaffaq Nyrabia is the Ambassador to the European Union and an active member of the Syrian opposition government. Best known for his pivotal role in the creation of the Damascus Declaration, Nyrabia is well respected among the intellectual community; his ideas can be considered the structural basis for the revolution. His position is key to maintaining strong diplomatic connections with other nations if crises were to erupt.

Marwan Hajo is a member of the Syrian National Council and is Head of the Membership Committee. Hajo’s role has been crucial in the initial stages of the National Council. Since he is an active member of the Council, we could expect him to dissent on some issues within the National Coalition.

Walid al-Bunni is a national figure that serves as Spokesman for the Syrian opposition. As one of the original activists to decry the oppressive regime since the death of al-Assad’s father, he is internationally recognized. His statements are crucial to maintaining peace and presenting a strong and united Coalition.

Monzer Makhous became a member of the Syrian National Council during the beginning of the Syrian Civil War and is recognized by France as the official spokesman for the Syrian National Coalition; he is also the Ambassador to France. Makhous must strive to present a coherent message to the international community during these tumultuous times.

Walid Saffour was appointed Ambassador to the UK for the **Syrian Coalition** on 26 November 2012. Saffour is the current President of the Syrian Human Rights Committee (SHRC) and has strived to promote peace and equality among Syrians. While his views are largely admired, his daughter has been known to promote radical Islamist ideas. However, Saffour's opinions have strong pull among Muslims in the international community.

Jaber Zain is head of the Local Coordination Committees of Syria, which are a network of local groups that are tasked with the mission of spreading the news on protests and political events. The coordination committees have played a pivotal role in the Syrian Civil War. The network is known for supporting civil disobedience and opposing the current Syrian government.

Ahmad Jarba is a Syrian opposition leader and member of the Revolutionary Council of Syrian Clans representing Al-Hasakah. Although Jarba has a strong influence over the Syrian National Coalition as someone who could easily make a bid for the president of the Coalition, he has had trouble managing minority or dissenting voices among the group.

Abdul Hakim Bashar is a leader of the Kurdish National Council. Although deeply intertwined with the Syrian National Council at the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, there is a crucial difference between the two. While the KNC promotes the need for Kurdish autonomy, the SNC would only ever agree to increased decentralization, rather than complete autonomy. Bashar has been keen on pointing out the regional diversities that characterize Syria.

Sadiq Jalal Al-Azm is a leader of the Union of Syrian Authors and an internationally recognized champion of intellectual freedom and free speech. His contribution to the study of Orientalism has been remarkable and his tenacity in sharing crucial knowledge is well known. Al-Azm's press releases would carry much weight among the press community.

Alhareth al-Nabhan is the leader of the Citizenship Movement, or Mouatana, which calls for a geographically and demographically unified democratic civil state in Syria; a state consisting of equal, free and individual citizens, where no sectarian, ethnic, gender or any other discrimination exists. Although Nabhan forms a minority among the Syrian opposition, his proposals are the subjects of much debate.