APL MUN 2024 UNHRC BACKGROUND GUIDE

Addressing the humanitarian crisis in the Syrian Civil War.
Freeze date: 5th March, 2020

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Introduction to Agenda

Dear Delegates,

The Executive Board is thrilled to welcome you to the APLMUN 2024, UNHRC. We hope to start off with an introduction to the agenda at hand,

One cannot begin to imagine the suffering and loss felt by the Syrian citizens keeping in mind the number of lives the Syrian conflict has cost as of 2020 amounts to almost 15 fully occupied stadiums bustling with people. In addition to the bloodshed, more than half of Syria's pre-war population of 22 million have had to flee their homes. Some 6.8 million are internally displaced. Our television, internet, and even food is a great luxury to more than 2 million civilians in tented camps. The origin of this conflict is attributed to simple protests against Syria's government due to high unemployment, corruption, and a lack of political freedom.

When the Syrian 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 at first to defend themselves and later to rid their areas of security forces.

Mr Assad vowed to end what he called "foreign-backed terrorism". The escalating unrest soon evolved into a civil war with both the protesters and the government being supported by and supporting their militias. Foreign powers began to take sides, sending funds, weaponry, and fighters, and as the chaos worsened resulted in the involvement of extremist jihadist organisations with their own aims, such as the Islamic State (IS) group and al-Qaeda.

The Assad government's key supporters have been Russia and Iran, while Turkey, Western powers, and several Gulf Arab states have backed the opposition to varying degrees during the conflict.

A conflict lasting 13 years, since 2011 still has not concluded, however, it did reach a ceasefire in March 2020 with continued sporadic clashes, air strikes and shelling since. Russia and Turkey brokered this ceasefire to halt a push by the government to retake Idlib.

A safe zone created in the Northeast region provides medical aid and basic supplies to citizens through the help of UNHRC and other international organisations, although millions of civilians out of reach in terms of aid are left to wonder if help and peace will ever reach them.

The government has regained control of Syria's biggest cities, but large parts of the country are still held by rebels, jihadists, and the Kurdish-led SDF. There have been no shifts on the front lines for three years. The last remaining opposition stronghold is in the north-western province of Idlib and adjoining parts of northern Hama and western Aleppo provinces.

Expectations of the Executive Board

The Executive Board would like to emphasise certain expectations from the delegates and the committee;

1. Address the impact and/or use of chemical weaponry, torture, and inhumane treatment.
2. Facilitate the thorough provision of aid to civilians through various methods, including but not limited to aiding women and children, with medical assistance, education, and more.
3. Exhibiting knowledge of past UN actions on the matter, the responsibilities of the UN, and enabling the extension of pre-established UN goals.
4. Analyse the shortcomings of past UN resolutions and address viable solutions.

While we at the UNHRC cannot force nations to withhold from conflict, we can invent new solutions to ensure the safety of civilians in need of aid and ways to evacuate those in war zones effectively. In situations of conflict, as is the case with Syria, it is vital to consider the impact of the multitude of parties involved on each other but it is just as important to consider their influence on aid and rescue efforts provided.

For delegates, a few suggestions include;
1. Go through the Rules of Procedure and follow it strictly for ease of flow within the committee.
2. Follow your foreign policy based on the country assigned, violating foreign policy without substantial reasoning is not acceptable in committee.
3. Ensure you are thorough with the history and facts of the conflict, and ensure that they are from reputed sources.
4. Do not use the background guide as the only source of information to substantiate any statements, it is meant for research purposes only and does not cover the full scope of debate. Read further on each point in your own time.
5. The Executive Board is here to aid with the facilitation of debate. You may raise any concerns to us directly, and we may clarify statements or put forth any questions at any point of debate.

Regardless of whether you are a first-timer or a seasoned delegate, we, as your executive board, hope to make this conference engaging, entertaining, and educational for all of you.

Yours sincerely,
The UNHRC Executive Board

Use of Sources

As all delegates must obtain trustworthy and accurate information, it is to be noted that under no circumstances would we accept the use of Wikipedia or AI such as ChatGPT. While you may utilise them for your own understanding of the topic, references to facts in speeches, rebuttals, and more must come from trusted sources.

1. Use of any documents and findings from linked UN bodies is considered trustworthy to support claims and arguments.

2. Use of documents from international organisations such as NATO, NAFTA, SAARC, BRICS, EU, ASEAN, OPEC, and the International Criminal Court can serve as reputable sources of information.

3. Use of government reports is accepted by the Executive Board as a credible source of information, although any arguments may be denied by another country.

4. Reports and research papers from JSTOR, Brookings, Rand and other reputed think tanks can be considered substantially reputed.

5. If needed, the use of news sources is allowed in committee. Any article clearly mentioning or contradicting a fact expressed by a delegate from a substantially reputable and credible news source (for example, Reuters) may be accepted and used to favour or to oppose a country, though it may be denied by the delegate of another country under any circumstances.

6. Regional news sources are also permitted however note that these articles may contain biases and will be considered less credible than a UN Agency report or a report of a credible news agency.

Committee History

The Human Rights Council is the main intergovernmental body within the United Nations. It was established on March 15, 2006, by the General Assembly with the passing of Resolution 60/251. It is responsible for strengthening the promotion and upholding of human rights around the globe, replacing the former Commission of Human Rights.

The Council, composed of 47 member states, establishes a multilateral forum to address human rights violations and country-specific situations. It responds to human rights emergencies and makes recommendations and decisions on how to better implement human rights.

The Human Rights Council facilitates global discourse on human rights matters, including those of UN representatives, mandated specialists, nations, non-governmental organisations, and other stakeholders. It adopts resolutions or decisions at regular sessions that reflect the world community's position on specific human rights concerns or circumstances. The adoption of a resolution is meant to send a powerful political signal that might compel governments to take action to correct certain problems.

Crisis meetings, known as special sessions, are held to respond to serious human rights issues, with 36 of them convened to date. The Council reviews the human rights records of all UN Member States through the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and appoints independent experts to monitor specific circumstances. The Council appoints Special Procedures, independent human rights experts who monitor specific countries or themes. It also authorises commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions to gather evidence on war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Committee Proceedings (ROP)

This year's proceedings for the UNHRC have undergone a significant change. The traditional resolution format has been replaced by a more action-oriented Framework of Action (Note link to FOA Template).

 It is important to note that the committee will proceed as per the UNA USA Procedure but will exclude the involvement of a Resolution. **The Framework of Action is the document we expect you to work on and submit by the beginning of Day - 2**. This Framework is a more comprehensive, specific, and well-established document, clarifying what your "BLOC" wants to achieve by passing it during committee.

It essentially functions as a summary of a directive (an action plan) and is more action oriented and involves details of initiatives implemented, such as when, why, how, where, and more, such as funding, resources, etc . Do study the format of the Framework of Action well, documents will come under scrutiny on grounds of intent, structure and effectiveness.

Framework of Action

The Framework Of Action is designed to foster more dynamic and cooperative actions. Rather than focusing on drafting a singular, often contentious resolution, delegates are expected to collaborate and develop a comprehensive set of guidelines and strategies keeping the issues at hand in mind.

This framework allows for continuous adaptation and refinement, accommodating the multifaceted nature of the Syrian conflict. It encourages iterative problem-solving, which is crucial for addressing the evolving situation. Drafting a Framework Of Action requires delegates to think critically about concerns such as transport, staff, coordinates, weapons and funding in detail.

It is important to note that while the Framework of Action is inclusive of a broad range of perspectives and solutions, the document must be binding with the [UNHRC Mandate](#).

Keep in mind that the Framework of Action is **not to be utilised to pursue any military action against nations or groups.** Any task that the UNHRC cannot recommend through their existing mandate ([Mandate of UN Human Rights | OHCHR](#)) cannot be performed through the Framework of Action. As an example, UN peacekeeping forces cannot be moved to stop the spread of ISIS in a remote village, but UN pamphlets can be spread to stop propaganda in the education system or survivors can be airlifted out of bombing zones by the UN.

Format

Preamble
The preamble section establishes the context, justifies the need for the resolution, and acknowledges previous efforts. It typically starts with preambular phrases (e.g., "Recognizing," "Noting," "Concerned by"). It's the same as preambulatory clauses in a resolution, we recommend that you include 4 - 5 relevant and binding clauses relating to the conflict at hand. We look favourably on the addressing of previous UN resolutions, UN recognized documents, conventions, and legally binding international documents.

Objectives
The objectives section sets the central theme and intention of the Framework and what it aims to achieve by stating goals and objectives. They are essentially short, well structured points, keeping in mind the reason and intention behind drafting the document. These objectives serve as guiding principles for the proposed actions in later parts of the document. An example would include:

- *To protect civilians from violence and uphold their fundamental human rights.*

Operative Clauses:
The most important part of the framework are your operatives. An operative clause is a well structured paragraph that mentions a joint diplomatic action taken to address issues in detail. The clauses contain actionable elements that transform objectives and strategies into practical steps. (Note that these actions have to be in accordance with the UNHRC Mandate)

Essentially, these clauses are like a summary of a directive. Each clause defines who is responsible for the action, the timeline and area of implementing such an action, the resources required, and the mechanisms needed for execution. By clearly specifying measures to be adopted and the entities involved, operative clauses ensure that the framework of action is concrete and enforceable. **Every clause is subject to Point of Orders, they will be passed by a majority vote. Delegates must note that if more than 4 Point of Orders are passed, the Framework gets scrapped.**

Factors to keep in mind:

Clarity and Precision: Ensure each clause is clearly worded and unambiguous. This avoids misinterpretation and ensures that all parties understand the exact actions required.

Action-Oriented Language: Use strong, directive verbs to convey the actions to be taken. Words like "implements," "enforces," "establishes," and "monitors" are effective in conveying the necessary actions.

Responsibility Assignment: Clearly identify who is responsible and well suited to take each action. This could be specific organisations, departments, or individuals to ensure accountability. The involvement of relevant parties is key.

Measurable Outcomes: Define specific, measurable outcomes for each action. This helps in tracking progress and evaluating the effectiveness of the framework.

Timelines: Include deadlines or time frames for each action to ensure timely implementation and to provide a schedule for progress reviews.

Resources and Support: Specify the resources (financial, human, or material) required to implement each action, and indicate how these resources will be allocated.

Compliance and Monitoring: Include mechanisms for monitoring progress and compliance. This could involve regular reporting, audits, or reviews by a designated body.

Legal and Regulatory Alignment: Ensure that the operative clauses are in line with existing laws, regulations, and policies to avoid conflicts and ensure smooth implementation.

Context on the Origin of Conflict

1970s:
Hafez al-Assad seized control from a Baathist military junta in 1970, centralising power in the presidency. He came from the Alawi minority, a heterodox Shia sect that had long been persecuted in Syria. Rioting breaks out after President Assad drops the constitutional requirement that the president must be a Muslim. Suppressed by the army.

1980s:
After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Muslim groups instigated uprisings and riots in Aleppo, Homs, and Hama. Syria backs Iran in the Iran-Iraq war, in keeping with the traditional rivalry between Baathist leaderships in Iraq and Syria. In February 1982, Hafez al-Assad ordered the military to put down a Muslim Brotherhood uprising in the city of Hama with brute force. Syrian forces killed more than twenty-five thousand people.

2000s:
Bashar al-Assad succeeded his father in 2000, pledging reforms. The detention of MPs and other pro-reform activists is crushing hopes of a break with the authoritarian past of Hafez al-Assad. Arrests continued, punctuated by occasional amnesties, over the following decade. He promised to let markets take the place of the "Arab socialism" touted by the Baathist state, upending old patronage networks. He broke up and privatised state monopolies, but the benefits were concentrated among those well-connected with the regime.

Syria's media was co-opted and restricted. A few months into Bashir Assad's rule, there was some privatisation of the press liberalisation, but licences were granted only to the media outlets of the political groups included in the Progressive National Front (Parties allied with the Baath party)

In 2007, extreme poverty was at 12 per cent, while an estimated 30 percent of the population lived in poverty.

2010:
A record-setting drought from 2006 to 2010, Mismanaged farmland was rendered fallow and farmers migrated to cities in ever-larger numbers. The Arab Spring began in December 2010 with the self-immolation of a Tunisian fruit vendor decrying corruption.

The SSSC sentenced dozens of Kurdish political activists to prison in 2010, including many members of the PYD political party, which is affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

2011:

In March 2011, (President Assad) anti-government protests broke out in Syria, inspired by a wave of pro-democracy uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa- Specifically Egypt and Tunisia.   President Assad announced conciliatory measures, releasing dozens of political prisoners, dismissing the government, lifting the 48-year-old state of emergency.

This was a period where poverty was at an all-time high due to severe droughts causing 1.5 million people to migrate from the countryside into cities, exacerbating poverty and social unrest. A secondary cause for this could be intra-religious conflict. Most Syrians are Sunni Muslims, but Syria's security establishment has long been dominated by members of the Alawi sect, of which Assad is a member.

These events were known as the Arab Spring. By the summer of 2011, armed opposition groups, such as the Free Syrian Army (FSA) formed primarily of military defectors, had emerged.

The Syrian Government rejected a peace plan presented by the Arab League (an organisation of Arab states in North Africa and the Middle East) and which was backed by the UN. In August, the US, UK, and others called for Assad to stand down. Syria was suspended from the League in November.

In April the UN Human Rights Council "unequivocally condemned the use of lethal violence against peaceful protesters."

In August the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted a presidential statement condemning 'the widespread violations of human rights and the use of force against civilians by the Syrian authorities." However, in October Russia and China, as well as India, Brazil, and South Africa, refused to support a Security Council resolution applying significant pressure on the Syrian government.

2012:
In 2012, fighting widened and spread to the capital Damascus and Syria's second-largest city, Aleppo (named as a civil war in June).

Iran stepped up support to Assad, providing military advisors and helping found pro-government militias, such as the National Defence Forces.

The UN Security Council endorses a non-binding peace plan drafted by UN envoy Kofi Annan. China and Russia agree to support the plan after an earlier, tougher draft is modified.

2013:

By September 2013, 2 million refugees were displaced. 2013 included the emergence of Islamic State/Daesh in eastern Syria and Western Iraq. Over several months, the group established control over large parts of both countries. At its height, the group held around a third of Syria
and 40% of Iraq.

UN chemical weapons inspectors confirmed the use of the nerve agent Sarin in an attack on areas around Damascus in August 2013, though did not allocate responsibility to any party. Assad agreed to hand over his remaining chemical weapons and completed this process for the weapons he had declared by June 2014.

At the beginning of 2013, currently operating in the northern and north-eastern regions of the country, reached Syria from Iraq. This was the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as The Islamic State of Iraq and Sham, ISIS.

2014:
UN-brokered peace talks in Geneva fail, largely because Syrian authorities refused to discuss a transitional government.

UN Security Council resolution in **2014** aimed at securing humanitarian aid routes, aid became politicised and failed to reach rebel controlled areas.

In August 2014, US air forces intervened militarily in Syria for the first time, as part of a coalition campaign against Islamic State in both Iraq and Syria. Participants included Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar.

ISIS took control of Falluja, Mosul and Tikrit in Iraq, and declared itself a caliphate, which is a political and religious territory ruled by a leader known as a caliph.

That same year, the Pentagon announced a program to train Syrian rebels to fight against ISIS. However, this initiative was nixed a year later when only about 150 rebels were recruited.

2015:
Russia carries out its first airstrikes in Syria. This involved deploying Russian ground troops and aerial attacks on Islamic State and Free Syrian Army forces.

UN Security Council Resolution 2254, unanimously adopted in December 2015, called for the creation of a constitutional committee to draft a new constitution for Syria. The constitutional committee first met in 2019.

The number of Syrian refugees stood at four million in 2015. Labelled a "refugee crisis" by the UN, there were 1.3 million asylum claims in the EU that year.

2016:

In August 2016, Turkish forces intervened militarily in northern Syria, targeting Islamic State and some Kurdish forces. As a result of five military operations from 2016 to 2022, Turkey now occupies a series of areas in northern Syria.

The UN-mandated International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM), was established in 2016 assisted investigations and prosecutions of war crimes and other serious crimes in Syria,by engaging with national judicial authorities on their investigations.

2017:

In January 2017, Iran, Turkey, and Russia began talks in Astana in Kazakhstan. These were aimed at consolidating a national ceasefire and establishing pathways towards a political settlement of the conflict. As part of the Astana talks, the countries agreed to establish four "de-escalation areas" which allowed for the cessation of hostilities.

The US allegedly decides to launch a missile attack on an airbase from which Syrian government planes allegedly staged a chemical weapons attack on the rebel-held town of Khan Sheikhoun.

The US decides to arm the YPG Kurdish Popular Protection Units. They fight alongside the main opposition Syrian Democratic Forces, which captures the important Tabqa dam from Islamic State.

In 2017, Syria had also agreed to continue Russia's leases on air and naval bases in the country until at least 2066.

2018:

From January to April 2018 more than 920,000 individuals had been newly displaced inside of Syria, according to the UN

In April 2018, the UK, US, and France said that the Syrian regime was responsible for an alleged chemical weapons attack in Douma. The three countries conducted airstrikes the same month. After a chemical attack on Douma in Eastern Ghouta, there were renewed international efforts to deter use of chemical weapons.

Russia vetoed the Security Council in February and April, preventing the creation of a UN-led investigatory mechanism. However, in June, the Chemical Weapons Conventions granted the OPCW (Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons) permanent authorization to investigate and assign responsibility for chemical weapons attacks. According to the UN Commission of Inquiry, the armed groups regularly arbitrarily arrested and tortured civilians in Douma, including members of religious minority groups.

The Syrian army recaptured almost all of the south of the country, up to the borders with Jordan and Israeli-held territory.

2019:
The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) projected that 11.7 million people in Syria would require humanitarian and protection assistance in 2019.

US withdraws troops from northern Syria, prompting Turkey to attack US Kurdish allies in the area.

The Syrian-Russian military alliance launched hundreds of daily attacks since late April 2019 to retake areas in northwest Syria from anti-government groups. An alleged attack by those forces destroyed or rendered inoperable over 50 health facilities in Idlib and northern Hama, in response to which an investigation was launched by the UN.

A new Syrian constitutional committee met to draft a new constitution for Syria, under UN Resolution 2254. Talks in 2019 failed to make progress. In response to the Turkish invasion of North Syria against Kurdish forces, US troops withdrew from the Turkish border to other parts of northeast Syria.

2020:
A reminder to all delegates that the freeze date is set to 5th March 2020, information provided below is general and to provide an overall idea of the year.

In March 2020, a ceasefire between Turkey and Russia over Idlib, an area held by several opposition groups, was agreed. This followed several weeks of fighting in the province. The ceasefire has largely held. Russia used its veto at the Security Council to allow UN aid deliveries to the rebel-held north through only one border crossing, down from four the previous year.

With the unprecedented depreciation of the national currency, the imposition of further international sanctions, and crises in neighboring countries, the Syrian economy went into freefall for much of 2020. Protests in southern Syria at growing economic hardship prompt President Assad to dismiss Prime Minister Imad Khamis.

More than 9.3 million Syrians had become food insecure and over 80 percent of Syrians lived below the poverty line. By March 2020, 84 medical facilities had suspended their operations in the governorates of Idlib and Aleppo according to the United Nations.

Noting that agreements in the northeast broadly continued to hold, the UN envoy maintained that the arrangements were far from ideal for the front-line response demanded by the COVID-19 outbreak as of March.

Summary on Current Conflict

A simplification of the current facets of conflict would show that Syria is a country that is now the scene of a series of four interacting wars and power struggles:

- A war against ISIS that intersects with the fight against ISIS in Iraq, which is the focus of U.S.-led military efforts, and is concentrated in the populated areas of Eastern Syria.

- A struggle for some form of separate identity by Syria's Kurds in northern Syria that has become tied to Turkey's fighting against its Kurdish rebels, while the Syrian Kurds have become the key U.S. ally on the ground in the fight against ISIS.

- A fight between the pro-Assad faction (allegedly backed by Russia, Iran and Hezbollah) and largely Sunni Arab rebels-who can be termed the Anti Assad faction-that have been backed by the Arab Gulf states and Jordan, and have had limited U.S. support.

- Struggles within the Arab rebel forces that increasingly divide them between more moderate and secular forces and a steadily growing mix of Islamic extremist groups, some with ties to Al Qaeda

Nations Involved in the Conflict

Turkey

Turkish forces first entered northern Syria in 2016. Their presence forms part of a wider Turkish military campaign against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey. The Turkish Government considers the PKK a terrorist threat with links to Kurdish groups in north-east Syria such as the People's Defence Units (YPG).

The YPG forms part of a wider coalition called the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which has US backing (though the US, as well as UK and EU, consider the PKK a terrorist group). As a result of five military operations from 2016 to 2022, Turkey now occupies a series of areas in northern Syria. It is unlikely to withdraw until it feels assured of its security.

Russia

In 2015, Russia militarily intervened to prevent the possible collapse of the Assad regime. The intervention followed Russian vetoes of multiple UN resolutions and sanctions that sought to place diplomatic or economic pressure on Assad.

Russian military support has primarily (allegedly) been in the form of air and naval support and the mercenary Wagner Group, with Iranian and Assad forces conducting most ground operations.
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Iran and Hezbollah

As set out in the Commons Library research briefing on Iran's influence in the Middle East, Syria is a long-standing ally of Iran. The Iran-Syria alliance is considered by many as a tactical-cum-strategic partnership between two allegedly authoritarian regimes. Mutual contempt for Saddam Hussein's Iraq brought Syria and Iran together in 1980, and mutual fear and loathing of the United States and Israel has helped sustain their alliance.

Cooperation is despite Syria's Sunni-majority population and Iran's Shia government. Syria's ruler, President Assad, is, however, an Alawite Muslim. Although a separate group, it shares some practices with Iran's Shia Muslims.

Since the 1980s, Iran has also allegedly provided substantial support to Hezbollah in Lebanon, which also has a presence in Syria. Hezbollah has long conducted attacks against Israel and is a significant military and political force in Lebanon.

During Syria's civil war, Iran has provided both economic and military support to Assad and (allegedly) helped establish pro-government and pro-Iran militias. Those groups backed by Iran (allegedly) include the Syrian National Defence Forces and Local Defence Forces.

The number of Iranian troops and advisors deployed is uncertain: In 2018 the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project estimated that Iran had around 10,000 troops in the early stages of the Syria conflict and cited claims that Iran-backed militias could mobilise up to 80,000.

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) also has a presence in Syria.

Public information is limited, but Iran's support during the last decade is reported to include:
  - Financial support, estimated to be around US$ 6 billion a year by one UN official in 2015.22
  - Supplies of oil, valued to be around US$ 10 billion from 2013 to 2018.
  - Military training of pro-government militias by the Quds force with Lebanese Hezbollah, training the Syrian National Defence Force, a group loyal to Assad, (Alleged by US Treasury Department)

Given the sanctions in place against the Syrian regime and the collapse in Syria's economy over the last decade, Iran's extension of financial support has helped keep the Assad regime afloat

Iran's primary objective is to keep its long-standing ally, President Assad, in power. Beyond this, it is allegedly seeking greater influence within Syria through its Shia militias, and a stake in reconstruction. Developing militia forces helps project Iran's influence abroad and support its wider objectives of achieving security for its regime and to pose a threat to Israel.

United states

American troops have been in Syria since 2015. On any given day there are at least 900 U.S. forces in Syria, along with an undisclosed number of contractors. They are trying to prevent any comeback by the Islamic State group (ISIS), which swept through Iraq and Syria in 2014, taking control of large swaths of territory.

For years, the U.S. and its coalition allies battled IS in Iraq and Syria, partnering with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces. By 2019, the U.S. declared the Islamic State caliphate destroyed, but remnants of the group remain a threat, including about 10,000 fighters held in detention facilities in Syria and tens of thousands of their family members living in refugee camps.

U.S. forces advise and assist the SDF, including in securing the detention facilities, and they also conduct counterterror missions against the Islamic State group and other al-Qaeda-affiliated militants

The US presence has sometimes proved challenging, given the other foreign powers present in Syria. Since 2015, the US and Russia have maintained a "deconfliction

mechanism" governing air safety protocols (meaning information is shared to reduce or prevent the risks of conflict and hazards).

The US Administration has often been criticised for lacking a coherent policy on Syria. Opponents cite the relatively few sanctions applied under the Biden administration, a failure to stop Arab states from normalising their relations with Assad and allowing Russia to provide support to Assad and lead negotiations on a political settlement for Syria.

However, relative US disengagement from the conflict and the increasing role of Russia and Iran are not new. Russia was invited to begin airstrikes in Syria by Assad in 2015 and Russian-initiated Astana talks began in 2017 (though have not achieved a political solution to the conflict, as set out in section 5). In 2017, the Trump Administration also ended funding for some opposition groups, and in 2019 withdrew forces from some Kurdish-held areas, while the Biden Administration has continued to call for a political solution to the conflict and said it will not normalise relations with Assad.

Israel

Syrian-Israeli relations have been dominated by the legacy of the Arab-Israeli conflicts that followed the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. The countries have not reached a formal peace settlement. In the third Arab-Israeli war of 1967, Israeli forces occupied the Golan Heights in southwestern Syria and unilaterally annexed them in 1981.

The US recognised them as Israeli in 2019, though other states have not done so. Since 1982, a UN disengagement observer force has been in place on the Heights to supervise the continuing ceasefire. During the Syrian civil war, Israeli forces have not primarily been concerned with Assad Government forces. Rather, Israeli forces have focused on constraining Assad's allies, namely Iran, Lebanese Hezbollah (which have been supported by Iran since the 1980s), and other Iran-aligned groups in Syria.

Israel has conducted airstrikes since 2013 to achieve these aims. These actions form part of a wider containment policy against Iran's influence in the Middle East and the threat of attacks on Israel from neighbouring Lebanon.

Qatar

In 2013, the Financial Times reported that Qatar had funded the Syrian rebellion by at least $1 billion and "as much as $3 billion" over the first two years of the civil war. It reported that Qatar was offering refugee packages of about $50,000 a year to defectors and families and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute estimated that Qatar had fueled the war by delivering more weapons to Syria than any other country.

Qatar, it seems, is driven in the endeavour to assist the rebel forces by the force of the emir and his prime minister, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani. Both men feel that Qatar has a

role to play in reconstructing the Arab world after the upheavals it has experienced. Wherever and whenever it can, Qatar then will seek to have an influence on the process of events in the region around it.

Saudi Arabia

The Saudi regime was a benefactor of Hafez al-Assad, the father of Bashar, for close to three decades, and that the two regimes' interests often converged in the region. Examples of an Assad-Saudi convergence include the crackdown against the Palestinian resistance and Lebanese left in 1976, the 1991 war on Iraq, the coordination of policies in the U.S.-sponsored peace plans, and the enmity to Yasser Arafat, the late leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

As soon as the Arab uprisings broke out in 2011, the Saudi-UAE alliance worked (often alongside Israel) to maintain the established order or return deposed tyrants to power.

However, both Saudi Arabia and Qatar expected a quick fall of the regime. When, for a variety of reasons, that did not happen, they sped to sponsor and arm fighting groups inside Syria that they could control. The Saudis in particular saw an opportunity to turn Syria into a sectarian conflict for its own ends.

Armed rebel and opposition groups with different names sprouted inside the country and Saudi Arabia had became a key player in supporting the proxy war aimed at toppling al-Assad. Riyadh supplied an array of local rebel groups with finances and weaponry, including US-made anti-tank missiles, as part of the effort. The campaign faltered following larger counter-interventions by al-Assad's chief foreign patrons, Russia and Iran.

Arab League

Founded in 1945, the Arab League is a loose alliance of nearly two dozen Arab countries that have pledged to cooperate on economic and military affairs, among other matters.
The league makes decisions on a majority basis, but there is no mechanism to compel members to comply with resolutions. It has been criticised for its internal conflicts and collective inaction on important international issues.

According to its charter, the founding members of the Arab League—Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Transjordan, and Yemen—agreed to seek "close cooperation" on matters of economics, communication, culture, nationality, social welfare, and health.

They renounced violence as a means to settle conflicts between members and empowered league offices to mediate in such disputes, as well as in conflicts involving nonmembers.

Signatories agreed to collaborate in military affairs; this accord was strengthened with a 1950 pact committing members to treat acts of aggression against any member state as an act against all.

The Arab League has played a limited role in facilitating any peace negotiations in Syria, following the failure of UN missions backed by the League in 2011 and 2012.

The intervention of foreign powers in Syria following the rise of Islamic State in 2014 and divisions among Gulf states during the Qatar crisis further hindered any leading role it may have played.

In the early years of the Syrian civil war, many Arab states backed the armed opposition to Assad and broke relations with his government. In 2011, Syria was suspended from the Arab League.

As Assad's military position and his hold on power in Syria has strengthened since the mid-2010s, there has been increasing re-engagement.Outside the Middle East, but within the Arab League, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir became the first League leader to visit Syria in 2018, which was reported as signifying a wider attempt to re-establish ties with Syria

Rebel Groups

There are believed to be as many as 1,000 armed opposition groups in Syria, commanding an estimated 100,000 fighters. Here we look at the most prominent.

The Free Syrian Army (FSA) is a loose conglomeration of armed brigades formed in 2011 by defectors from the Syrian army and civilians backed by the United States, Turkey, and several Gulf countries.

In December 2016, the Syrian army scored its biggest victory against the rebels when it recaptured the strategic city of Aleppo. Since then, the FSA has controlled limited areas in northwestern Syria.

In 2018, Syrian opposition fighters evacuated from the last rebel stronghold near Damascus. However, backed by Turkey, the FSA took control of Afrin, near the Turkey-Syria border, from Kurdish rebel fighters seeking self-rule.

The FSA had over time developed sub-branches

Its banner was soon adopted by armed groups that began appearing across the country. Despite this, the FSA's leaders had little or no operational control over what was happening on the ground in Syria.

(SMC) The opposition's Western and Gulf Arab backers sought to encourage a centralised rebel leadership and in December 2012 a number of brigades affiliated themselves to a newly-created Supreme Military Council (SMC) which is a more moderate and stronger alternative to the jihadist rebel groups in Syria. Most believe that the FSA is simply a loose network of brigades rather than a unified fighting force.

SMC-aligned brigades retain separate identities, agendas and commands. Some work with hardline Islamist groups that alarm the West, such as Ahrar al-Sham, and al-Qaeda-linked jihadists.

The 7 Islamic Groups- In November 2013, seven Islamist groups - Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya, Jaysh al-Islam, Suqour al-Sham, Liwa al-Tawhid, Liwa al-Haqq, Ansar al-Sham and the Kurdish Islamic Front - declared that they were forming the largest rebel alliance yet in the conflict, with an estimated 45,000 fighters. They said the new Islamic Front was an "independent political, military and social formation" that aimed to "topple the Assad regime completely and build an Islamic state". They outlined a new command structure, with key roles shared between the seven groups, and said they would work towards a "gradual merger".

The announcement led to the dissolution of the Syrian Islamic Front (SIF), which was a part of the SMC-aligned Syrian Islamic Liberation Front (SILF). Analysts predicted that the move would undermine the SMC, and in December 2013 the front announced that it had withdrawn from the SMC's command. Days later, its fighters drove out SMC-aligned forces out of their headquarters and warehouses at the Bab al-Hawa border crossing with Turkey, prompting the US and UK to suspend "non-lethal" assistance for rebel groups in northern Syria.

The Islamic Front does not include al-Qaeda affiliates like the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) and the al-Nusra Front, but its charter welcomes foreign fighters, as "brothers who supported us in jihad", suggesting it is willing to cooperate with them.

(Kurdish Workers Party) PKK- The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), established by Abdullah Ocalan in 1978, has waged an insurgency since 1984 against Turkish authorities for greater cultural and political rights, primarily to establish an independent Kurdish state. Beyond Turkey, Syrian Kurdish fighters have been combating the Islamic State, largely as part of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)—an alliance of Arab and Kurdish fighters backed by the United States—and have carved out a semi-autonomous region in northern Syria.

Back in 1998, the Syrian regime curbed PKK activity on its soil and cut ties with the organisation after Turkey threatened to invade over the issue. Thereafter, relations between Turkey and Syria improved, in line with Turkey's Middle East policy whereby "any country that helps Turkey against the PKK is a friend and any country that helps the PKK is an enemy.

Reports surfaced that Assad was allowing the PKK and the PYD to operate inside Syria in late 2011. For example, Syria permitted the PYD to open six Kurdish "language schools" in northern Syria, which the group now uses for political work. What is more, in March 2012 the PKK reportedly moved between 1,500 and 2,000 of its members to Syria from the Iraq-Iran border.

ISIS/ ISIL- Islamic Republic of Iraq and Syria also known as Islamic republic of Iraq and the Levant is a powerful terrorist militant group that has seized control of large areas of the Middle East. The group focused on creating an Islamic state and implementing sharia law—a strict religious code based on traditional Islamic rules and practices.

ISIS has been called the richest terrorist organisation in the world. While estimates vary, the group was said to have made $2 billion in 2014 alone. In 2014, a U.S.-led coalition started airstrikes against ISIS targets in Iraq and Syria.

Shabihah Militants- Syria's government has blamed "armed criminal gangs and terrorists" for much of the unrest since March 2011, but activists accuse state-sponsored militia of assisting in the crackdown that has left more than 9,000 people dead. Throughout the uprising, many Syrians have said they have seen heavily-armed men dressed in black fighting alongside the security forces.

The men are accused not only of killing and beating people who attend demonstrations, but also of carrying out a campaign of intimidation that has included executions, drive-by shootings and sectarian attacks.

Activists say their presence has allowed the government to deny any involvement in the most brutal actions against protesters. They are commonly known, and recently titled by the UN as Shabihah.
The term is believed to have first appeared in relation to the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad after a crackdown was launched in the port city of Latakia, where a notorious, mafia-like organised crime syndicate called the Shabiha has existed since the 1970s.

In towns along the Mediterranean coast, local shabiha gangs are said to run protection rackets, weapons- and drug-smuggling rings, and other criminal enterprises. Residents dare not mention the name.

Membership of the shabiha gangs is drawn from President Assad's minority Alawite sect, which dominates the government, security services and military. Many are members of the Assad family or related families such as the Deeb and Makhlouf families. In May, the European Union imposed sanctions on Mr. Assad's first cousins, Fawwaz and Munzir, for their alleged involvement in "the repression against the civilian population as members of the shabiha". In late March 2011, the shabiha gangs appear to have come to the aid of President Assad when major anti-government protests erupted in Latakia, as well as the nearby towns of Baniyas and Jabla. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights said most of the 108 victims, including 49 children and 34 women, had been shot in their homes

Actions of the United Nations

The UN has been an active member working to resolve the conflict over the years. As of the Freeze date- 2020 a few pertinent UN Resolutions have been passed. A good resource for the detailed report of the resolutions would be this database from the Office of the UN High Commissioner which details every United Nations general assembly resolution pertinent to the Syrian Civil War since its beginning - https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/sdpage_e.aspx?b=3&c=179&t=11

The **2012** Geneva Communique of the UN-mediated "Action Group for Syria" remains the diplomatic foundation for a political transition in Syria, including the establishment of a "transitional governing body [with] full executive powers" and the possible inclusion of "members of the present government and the opposition and other groups . . . formed on the basis of mutual consent,"a "review of the constitutional order and the legal system" subject to "popular approval," and "free and fair multi-party elections."

UN Security Council resolution in **2014** aimed at securing humanitarian aid routes, aid became politicised as Assad would permit UN convoys to distribute food and medicine in government-held areas while denying them access to rebel-held areas, and rights advocates charged the regime with targeting medical facilities and personnel.

UN Security Council Resolution 2254, which passed unanimously in late **2015**, similarly supports a Syrian-led political process that is facilitated by the United Nations [that] establishes credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance and sets a schedule and process for drafting a new constitution, and further expresses its support for free and fair elections . . . administered under supervision of the United Nations . . . with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, eligible to participate.

The resolution also launched the most recent round of UN-mediated intra-Syrian talks and led to the cessation of hostilities. While imperfect, the February **2016** cessation of hostilities resulting from this initiative reduced violence, allowed humanitarian relief, and enabled a resumption of UN-sponsored peace talks.

The UN General Assembly in December **2016** empowered a new, independent panel to investigate and prosecute possible war crimes.

In **2020**, Syria's ally Russia used its veto at the Security Council to allow UN aid deliveries to the rebel-held north through only one border crossing, down from four the previous year.

Relevant International Documents

Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949- The Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, also known as the Fourth Geneva Convention, outlines protections for civilians during wartime. In the context of the Syrian civil war, the following articles are particularly pertinent:

Article 3: This article outlines the minimum protections that must be afforded to individuals not taking part in hostilities, including civilians.

Article 27: This article protects the rights of individuals in occupied territories, ensuring they receive humane treatment and are not subjected to violence or coercion.

Article 33: This article prohibits collective punishments and reprisals against civilians, emphasising the protection of individuals regardless of any actions by others.

Human Rights Council resolutions S-16/13 and S-17/1- Resolution S-16/13 and S-17/1 of the Human Rights Council address various aspects of human rights violations and the situation in Syria. Notable clauses include but are not limited to-

Resolution S-16/13:
Clause 1: Condemns the widespread and systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the Syrian authorities.
Clause 4: Calls for an immediate end to all violence and violations of human rights in Syria.
Clause 7: Urges the Syrian government to allow immediate, full, and unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance to all areas in need.

Resolution S-17/1:
Clause 3: Condemns the continued widespread and systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the Syrian authorities.
Clause 6: Calls for accountability for all violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law in Syria.
Clause 9: Urges all parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law and protect civilians.

Do note that these clauses are recommendatory to nations in nature, but still serve as a guideline for further improvement.

Plan of action of the League of Arab States of 12 and 16 November 2011-
The Plan of Action of the League of Arab States from November 2011 included specific provisions aimed at addressing the situation in Syria. Actions outlined in the plan included:

1. Deployment of Arab League observers to monitor the situation on the ground and report on compliance with the ceasefire and other provisions of the plan.
2. Calls for the Syrian government to immediately cease all acts of violence, release detainees, and allow free access to Arab and international media.
3. Cooperation between the Syrian government and the League of Arab States to facilitate the mission of observers and ensure their safety.
4. Implementation of the Arab League initiative to resolve the crisis in Syria, including dialogue between the government and opposition.

R2P- R2P began as an idea put forward by the International Commission on Intervention and
State Sovereignty (ICISS), an independent body established in response to the failures of the international community in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Kosovo.
CISS asserted in its 2001 report that every government has a responsibility to protect its people. Moreover, if a government fails this duty, then the international community has a responsibility to step in and intervene.

Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)- Syria became the 190th party to the Chemical Weapons Convention. Following months of deteriorating bilateral relations, elimination of Syria's chemical warfare capacity offered Russia and the United States common cause to rekindle security cooperation.
This move to eliminate usage of chemical weapons was initiated with the Executive Council of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) adopting the foundation of the framework agreement, and Executive Council decision.The UN Security Council endorsed it in Resolution 2118, which created the mandate for the UN secretary-general to support the disarmament project.

The UN Charter- The United Nations Charter is a foundational document that established the United Nations (UN) in 1945. It serves as the constitution of the UN. Articles of the UN charter particularly addressing the crisis in Syria include but are not limited to.

1. Article 1(1): To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace.

2. Article 2(4): This article prohibits the threat or use of force by member states against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. It emphasises

the importance of peaceful resolution of disputes.

3. Article 1(3): This article highlights the UN's commitment to promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms without discrimination based on factors such as race, gender, language, or religion.

4. Article 56: This article calls for all members to take joint and separate action in cooperation with the UN to achieve universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

5. Article 39: This article empowers the UN Security Council to determine the existence of any threat to peace, breach of peace, or act of aggression, and to make recommendations or take action to maintain or restore international peace and security.

6. Article 42: This article provides for enforcement actions by the Security Council, including the use of measures such as sanctions, blockades, or other actions not involving the use of armed force.

Closing Remarks

This marks the end of the Background Guide and we wish you the best of luck for your participation in the conference, and we hope to bring this committee to a successful conclusion.

For any queries, please write to us at unhrcmun@apl.edu.in

Best Wishes!

Yours Sincerely,
Executive Board of UNHRC