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**Decision on an urgent crisis:
“The Syria Crisis, Including Disputes With Turkey”**

The Security Council

After the atrocities and horrific destructions of World War II, the United Nations was founded as a multilateral approach to international cooperation in order to prevent any such tragedy from happening again. Since the founding states felt that one of the main reasons for the failure of the League of Nations, the United Nations' predecessor, was that it could at no point include all major powers in the process of keeping peace, the UN was established with a body comprising the four victors of World War II. The council was established under article 7 of the Charter of the United Nations as one of the UN's principal organs, with the details further outlined in chapters V to VIII of the charter.

The Security Council is not only one of the main bodies of the United Nations but also the most powerful and maybe even most important organ since, according to article 25 of the UN Charter, its decisions are legally binding on members of the United Nations. The UN Charter assigns to the Security Council the "primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security" and in order to assume this role it is given far-ranging authority: The Security Council may "investigate any dispute, or any situation which might lead to international friction or give rise to a dispute" and it may "at any stage of a dispute recommend appropriate procedures of methods of adjustment" in order to settle the matter peacefully. Moreover, chapter VII of the UN Charter provides the Security Council with the authority to take coercive measures. After having "determined the existence of any threat to peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression" the council can decide upon "measures not involving the use of armed forces," such as economic sanctions, or even "action[s] by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security." In order to implement the measures it has enacted, the Security Council may utilize regional arrangements or agencies.

Naturally, the application of coercive measures under articles 41 and 42 is highly debated among council members. This is one of the reasons why in the past the council has sometimes been unable to reach an agreement when it came to the use of force. Two concrete examples of such failures were the interventions in Kosovo 1999 and in Iraq in 2003. Such cases have put the Security Council and more generally the United Nations under a lot of criticism and pressure since they undermine the council's monopoly on the legitimization of the use of force internationally.

Originally 11 members were represented in the Security Council, five of which were permanent members and henceforth called „Permanent Five“ (or simply „P5“). Today these permanent members are: France, the People's Republic of China, which succeeded the Republic of China (Taiwan) as representative for the Chinese people in 1971, the Russian Federation, which continued the Soviet Union's membership in the UN in 1991, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America. These five states privileged in two ways: not only are they continuously represented in the council but also no substantive decision can be taken against their objection. The Security Council was reformed, and its membership extended to 10 non-permanent members in 1963. They are elected to the Security Council for a period of two years by the General Assembly and are not eligible for direct re-election.

Since five members of the council are elected each year, the council's composition changes annually. In order to ensure global representation, the non-permanent seats on the Security Council are allocated according to a regional key: three African states, two states from Asia and Latin America respectively, one state from Eastern Europe and two states from Western Europe and other member states. However other states may join the Security Council sessions as well: as observers or they may even be asked by the council to participate in meetings.

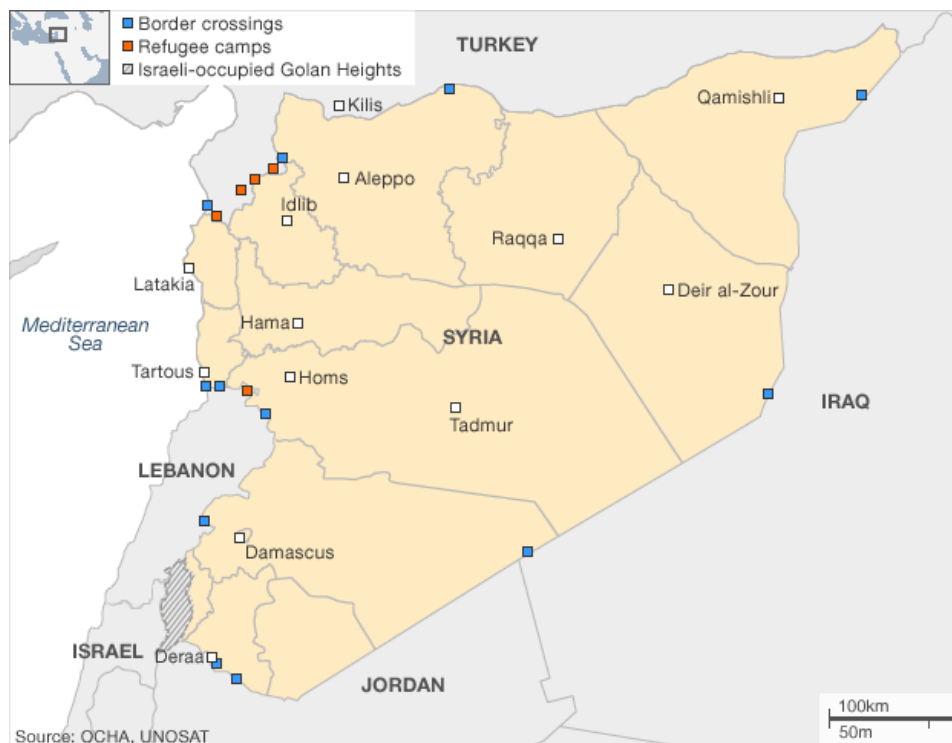
In order to fulfill its main task, the maintenance of international peace and security, and to be able to react immediately to international threats to international peace, the UN Charter determines that each member of the Security Council shall be represented at all times at the seat of the Organization and that the council is to meet continuously. Furthermore, the Security Council may establish such subsidiary organs it deems necessary for the performance of its functions". Currently these are, among others, the International Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and the Counter-Terrorism Committee. As a summary, the

United Nations Security Council is vested with the following functions and powers: maintenance of international peace and security in accordance with the principles and purposes of the United Nations;

- right to investigate any dispute or situation which might lead to international friction;
- right to recommend methods of adjusting such disputes or the terms of settlement;
- right to formulate plans for the establishment of a system to regulate armaments;
- right to determine the existence of a threat to the peace or act of aggression and to recommend what action should be taken;
- right to call on members to apply economic sanctions and other measures not involving the use of force to prevent or stop aggression;
- right to take military action against an aggressor;
- right to recommend the admission of new members;
- right to exercise the trusteeship functions of the United Nations in strategic areas;
- right to recommend to the General Assembly the appointment of the Secretary-General and, together with the Assembly, to elect the Judges of the International Court of Justice.

Historical Overview: Syria

As part of the Ottoman Empire, Syria turned into the short-lived Arab Kingdom of Syria in 1920, which was however soon committed under French Mandate. From 1938 known as a republic, Syria gained independence in 1946, entering the Arab-Israeli War in 1948. On May 29, 1945, France bombed Damascus and tried to arrest its democratically elected leaders. While French planes were bombing Damascus, Prime Minister Faris al-Khoury was at the founding conference of the United Nations in San Francisco, presenting Syria's claim for independence from the French Mandate. Continuing pressure from Syrian nationalist groups and British pressure forced the French to evacuate their last troops on April 17, 1946.



In 1946 Syria became an independent republic, but only three years later a democratic rule was overturned by an American supported coup in March. A brief union with Egypt in 1958 resulted in Syria's parliamentary system being replaced by a highly centralized presidential system. In 1961, the Union ended with Syria's secession. A military coup d'état brought the Ba'ath Party to power in 1963 and was followed by another coup in 1966. In 1970, then Defence Minister Hafez al-Assad seized power and declared himself President, a position he would hold until his death in 2000.

Since then, the Ba'ath Party has remained the sole authority in Syria, and Syrian citizens may only approve the President by referendum. Moreover, no multi-party elections for the legislature are held. Al-Assad also conducted a scorched earth policy against the town of Hama to quell an uprising by the Sunni Islamist community, including the Muslim Brotherhood and others, which became known as the Hama massacre, leaving tens of thousands dead.

When Hafez al-Assad died, he was succeeded by his son Bashar al-Assad, who speaks fluent English and inspired hopes for reform. A "Damascus Spring" of intense political and social debate took place from July 2000 to August 2001. The Damascus Spring ended in August 2001 with the arrest and imprisonment of ten

leading activists who had called for democratic elections and a campaign of civil disobedience. Renewed opposition activity occurred in October 2005 when activist Michel Kilo collaborated with other leading opposition figures to launch the Damascus Declaration, which criticized the Syrian government as "authoritarian, totalitarian and cliquish" and called for democratic reform.

Syria is a country of 21 million people with a large Sunni majority (74%) and significant minorities (10% each) of Christians and Alawites, the religious group that follows a branch of Shia Islam and to which Assad belongs. For years, Assad has promoted a secular identity for the Syrian state, hoping to unify diverse communities in a region where sectarian conflict is prominent as seen in neighboring Lebanon and Iraq. However, he also concentrated power in the hands of his family and members of the Alawite community, who wield a disproportionate power in the Syrian government, military and business elite. Claims of corruption and nepotism have been widespread among the excluded Sunni majority.

Protests in Syria started on 26 January 2011 and were influenced by other protests in the region. On the same day, one case of self-immolation was reported. Protesters have been calling for political reforms and the reinstatement of civil rights, as well as an end to the state of emergency which has been in place since 1963.

The domestic unrest in Syria was about to start. In March 2011 protests were held on the "Day of Dignity" in Damascus demanding release of political prisoners; some 35 people were arrested. At a "Day of Rage" rally in the southern city of Deraa, security forces shot a number of people dead, triggering days of violent unrest and more civilian deaths. The government announces conciliatory measures and releases dozens of political prisoners in an attempt to damp down the unrest. President Assad dismissed the government and soon started accusing protesters of being Israeli agents and terrorists.



In April 2011, although the state of emergency that was in force since 1963 was lifted, the situation worsened further. A month later, Syrian army tanks entered Deraa, Banyas, Homs and suburbs of Damascus in an effort to crush anti-regime protests violently. The US tightened sanctions in response to the bloody crackdown on protests, being followed by the European Union days later.

Various attempts by President Assad to damp down the unrest, such as announcing amnesty for political prisoners and pledging to start a "National dialogue" on reform, failed. Violence increased when in June 2011 the Syrian government stated that 120 members of their security forces had been killed by "armed gangs" in the northwestern town of Jisr al-Shughour. Troops besieged the town and more than 10,000 people fled to Turkey.

While President Assad sacked the governor of the Northern province of Hama in July after a mass demonstration there and sent in troops to restore order at the cost of scores of lives, the opposition organized dozens of opposition activists who met in Istanbul to form a unified opposition. As a result, a newly formed Syrian National Council stated that it has forged a common front of internal and exiled opposition activists.

The Current Situation

The current situation in the Syrian Arab Republic is worsening every day with a tremendous number of casualties building up: Masses of Syrian people are going to the streets to protest every day while the Syrian Army violently reacts against the opposition. The government has frequently called up the military to crush violent and non-violent protesters and has bombed dozens of rebel bases and protestors.

In December 2011, the death toll in the Syrian uprising exceeded 5,000 according to the UN. In the same month, Syria agreed to an Arab League initiative allowing Arab observers into the country, which brought new hope to the people. Thousands of protesters gathered in Homs to greet the Arab League monitors. However, the violence increased with the government vowing to respond with an "iron fist" to the recent suicide bombings in Damascus.

In January 2012, the Arab League suspended its monitoring mission due to the worsening violence in Syria. Tens of thousands of Syrians have fled the country in order to find sanctuary in Turkey, which has opened its borders to receive Syrian refugees. On April 9th, the Syrian army attacked over the border between Syria and Turkey, wounding and killing refugees. This military action has further aggravated tensions between Turkey and Syria.

In fact, Turkey has threatened Syria after tensions have escalated on their common border and has pushed for buffer zones for refugees. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has implicitly warned that Turkey may use force to set up a safe haven for refugees within Syrian territory if President Bashar al-Assad forces Turkey to take such a step.



The international community has pressured the Syrian government to cease fire and demanded the resignation of Bashar al-Assad. Numerous countries have pulled out all their diplomatic missions and imposed sanctions on the country and its government.

In February, Russia and China blocked a UN Security Council draft resolution on Syria, and the Syrian government stepped up the bombardment of Homs and other cities. New figures by the UN indicated that more than 7,500

people have died since the security crackdown began. A month later, Syrian forces recaptured Homs district of Baba Amr from rebels and carried out massacres causing refugees to flee to Lebanon.

The UN Security Council endorsed a non-binding peace plan drafted by the UN envoy and former Secretary-General of the UN Kofi Annan. China and Russia agreed to support the plan once an earlier, tougher draft was modified. Kofi Annan has lately visited Russia and China to guarantee the support from both nations in his Syrian plan, which was approved by both, the UN and the Arab League. The so-called "Annan Plan" set Tuesday, 10 April 2012 as the cease-fire date. In case of non-compliance with the plan, Bashar al-Assad would have had an extension of 48 hours.

On the day of the proposed cease-fire, Syrian troops were still present and firing in civil areas within the country, clearly ignoring the plan. Kofi Annan asked for patience with hopes that the plan could still work and bring the much-expected cease-fire.

Syria said it would abide by the ceasefire but reserved the right to respond to attacks. Annan received written assurances from the Syrian foreign ministry that government troops would "cease all military fighting throughout Syrian territory as of Thursday, 12 April while reserving the right to respond proportionately to any attacks carried out by armed terrorist groups."

After not seeing any changes in the violent behavior of the Syrian government towards the protestors, the Security Council condemned "in the strongest possible terms" the government's use of heavy weaponry and the militia killing of civilians in the small town of Houla near Homs. More than a hundred people, most of them women and children, were killed in the attack. France, the UK, Germany, Italy, Spain, Canada and Australia expelled senior Syrian diplomats in response.

In order to oversee Annan's six point plan, the Security Council authorized the deployment of up to 300 observers to Syria for three months to monitor a cease-fire described as incomplete. Despite the presence of the observers, killings in Syria continued and UN authorities started to speak of a brutal civil war in Syria. With violence escalating in the country, the UN suspended its observer mission on 16 June as rising bloodshed was posing significant risks to the lives of the 300 unarmed observers.

Throughout the whole crisis, tensions with neighboring Turkey have increased. After a Turkish plane was shot

down by Syria on 22 June, Turkey changed its rules of engagement. Turkey declared that if Syrian troops approached Turkey's borders they would be regarded as a military threat. Two days later, NATO leaders gathered at a meeting and expressed strong support for Turkey. Syria claimed the shooting down of the Turkish plane was an accident, and Assad stated his regret about the incident.

Although he was putting efforts in solving the conflict by diplomatic means, special UN envoy Kofi Annan acknowledged in an interview that the efforts of the international community to find a political solution to the escalating violence in Syria have failed. The last death toll released by the UN spoke of at least 9,000 killed and 14,000 detained Syrians. With the conflict spilling into neighboring Turkey and also Lebanon lately, tensions are at a new high.

UN Actions

Although the UN has been verbally pressuring the Syrian government regarding the uprising and domestic unrest, no UN Security Council resolution has been passed so far due to Russian and Chinese vetoes.

The first UN condemnation of Syria for the violent crackdown on anti-government protesters was laid down in **Draft resolution 2011/612 of 4 October 2011**, in which grave and systematic human rights violations in Syria were mentioned. The draft resolution warned of options for action to be considered against the government of President Bashar al-Assad if the unfolding situation warranted, including measures under the section of the United Nations Charter that allowed sanctions. Due to vetoes from Russia and China, the draft resolution failed to be adopted. China emphasized Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as the principle of non-interference in internal affairs. Together with China, Russia had also prepared a draft resolution. At the heart of the text was the respect for sovereignty and non-intervention into state affairs, the unity of Syrians and an invitation for all to an even-handed dialogue geared towards achieving peace by reforming the socio-economic life of the country. Russia could not agree with the "accusatory tone" of Draft resolution 612 nor with the threat of sanctions against Syria.



Draft resolution 2012/77 of 4 February 2012 was the last document regarding the Syria Crisis in the Security Council. Again, Russia and China vetoed. Supported by the 13 other council members, the text would have condemned widespread gross violations of human rights and "all violence, irrespective of where it comes from," while demanding that the Syrian government implements without delay the elements of a plan set out by the League of Arab States on 22 January.

That plan would have demanded that Syria immediately cease all violence and protect its population, release all persons detained arbitrarily, withdraw all military and armed forces from cities and towns, and guarantee the freedom to hold peaceful demonstrations.

Only the General Assembly adopted a resolution on Syria on 16 February 2012. **GA Resolution 11207** strongly condemns "widespread and systematic" human rights violations by Syrian authorities. The text passed by 137 votes in favor to 12 against, with 17 abstentions. Resolutions by the General Assembly are voted on by all member states of the United Nations and are not binding.

The Human Rights Council adopted with its Resolution **A/HRC/RES/19/22** a strong statement against the violations against human rights in Syria.

With an **presidential statement on 27 May**, the members of the Security Council condemned in the strongest possible terms the killings of dozens of men, women and children as confirmed by the UN and the wounding of hundreds more in the village of El-Houleh, near Homs in attacks that involved a series of government artillery and tank shellings on a residential neighborhood. The members of the Security Council also condemned the killings of civilians by shooting at close range and by severe physical abuse. The members of the Security Council extended their profound sympathies and sincere condolences to the families of the victims and

underscored their grave concern about the situation of civilians in Syria.

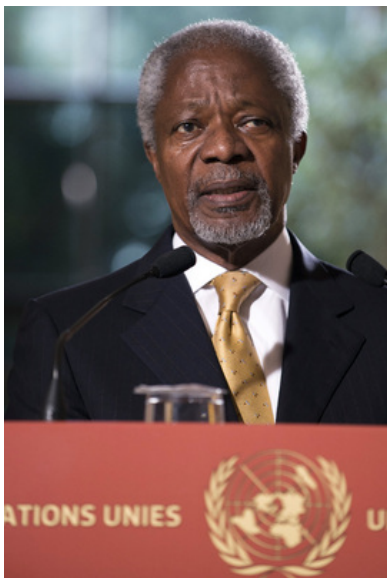


The **High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay** addressed the Security Council on 2 July. It was a closed-door session, but diplomats have leaked the content of the speech. She noted that the conflict is becoming increasingly sectarian and gradually eroding the fabric of society. She also said the lack of protection for civilians in Syria is becoming more apparent. Civilian casualties are increasing and access to humanitarian assistance and basic services is getting more limited.

On 14 July, United Nations observers who entered the Syrian village of Tremseh confirmed that an attack took place there two days ago, involving the use of artillery, mortars and small arms. The attack on Tremseh "appeared to be targeted at

specific groups and houses, mainly of army defectors and activists," said one of the spokespersons for the **UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS)**. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the Joint Special Envoy for the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, Kofi Annan, strongly condemned the attacks on Thursday in the Syrian village of Tremseh, which reportedly resulted in over 200 deaths. He stated further that this attack violates Syria's commitment to the six-point peace plan.

International Involvement



Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council

Along with the US, the EU states and other countries, also the Arab League and the GCC states have condemned the use of violence against the protesters. The Arab League suspended Syria's membership over the government's response to the crisis, but sent an observer mission in December 2011, as part of its proposal for a peaceful resolution of the crisis. The Arab League observers mission technically expired on 18 January. Nevertheless, as for 22 January, there were 165 observers on the ground in Syria. On 24 January, the Gulf Cooperation Council withdrew its 55 monitors out of the 165 strong observer mission while on 28 January the whole Arab League mission was suspended due to critical and deteriorating conditions.

Another attempt, the "Friends of Syria" initiative, was launched in late February 2012 in form of a multinational meeting that should discuss the resolution of the Syrian uprising. The initiative recognized the SC as the only representative of the Syrian people and appointed former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan as UN - Arab League peace envoy for Syria.

The European Union

On 22 March, Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, issued a statement which said that the European Union "strongly condemns the violent repression, including the use of live ammunition, of peaceful protests in various locations across Syria." Ashton reiterated the EU's condemnation on 31 July after military operations in the city of Hama resulted in at least 136 deaths. Ashton said on 18 August that "the EU notes the complete loss of Bashar al-Assad's legitimacy in the eyes of the Syrian people and the necessity for him to step aside."

The German minister of foreign affairs, Guido Westerwelle, declared that al-Assad will be judged for the violations against human rights in Syria. Westerwelle said: "Now the time has come that the Security Council finally shows the Assad regime its limits and finds sanctions if the Assad regime continues to refuse to withdraw its heavy weapons out of the cities and villages of Syria."

China

Syria and China enjoy significant and stable trade relations as China is actively involved in Syria's oil industry. There is not much knowledge in regards to the military cooperation between these two countries, except Chinese assistance for the Syrian ballistic missile programs in the 90s. In support of Russia's strong stand against international action, China has avoided condemning the regime or applying sanctions, saying that such methods could escalate into foreign intervention.

Russia

Historically, Russia has fostered a close economic cooperation with Syria, and, besides lucrative arms contracts worth at least four billion US Dollars, Russian companies play a substantial role in Syria's infrastructure, energy and tourism industries. In addition to significant trade relations, Russia has positioned its only Mediterranean naval base for its Black Sea Fleet in the Syrian port of Tartus. This naval supply and maintenance base has been established during the Cold War to support the Soviet Navy's fleet in the Mediterranean Sea. Since Russia forgave Syria three-fourths of its Soviet-era debt and became its main arms supplier, there have been negotiations about allowing Russia to enlarge and convert the port into a permanent Middle East base for Russia's nuclear-armed warships.

In the political sphere, Russia continues its strong association with the ruling Assad family and continuously obstructs international action against the Syrian regime. Russia promised to veto any sanctions against the Syrian government put before the Security Council and continued supplying large amounts of arms to Syria. During the last days Russia has circulated a draft UN Security Council resolution that would extend the UN mission in Syria for three more months but would stop short of threatening the Assad regime with sanctions.

The United States

US-Syrian relations have often been tense throughout the years, marred by American criticism of the Syrian interference in Lebanese politics and the various US executive orders and legislative actions that restricted trade relations with Syria and designated the country as a sponsor of international terrorism. After a period of rapprochement with Syria during the early Obama administration, Damascus's violent response to the Syrian uprising has dramatically worsened the relationship of the two countries, and Obama himself repeatedly called for Syrian president Bashar al-Assad to resign since August 2011. However, with the council deadlocked and Russia and China showing no public willingness to endorse a military intervention in Syria, the administration may be searching for new ways to accelerate Assad's departure.

On Friday the 13 July, the US Secretary of State urged the UN Security Council to warn the regime of al-Assad of consequences following news of the alleged massacre at the hands of his troops and a pro-government militia. The killings are said to have taken place in the village of Tremseh on Thursday morning, when government forces have allegedly surrounded residents and opened fire with mortars and artillery. Moreover, an Alawite pro-government militia, the Shabiha, was reported to have moved into Tremseh and to have started carrying out executions. Clinton said accounts of the government attack on the village of Tremseh provided "indisputable evidence that the regime deliberately murdered innocent civilians."

Further readings

Interactive Time Line: Syria unrest

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2012/02/201225111654512841.html>

Guide on the Syria Crisis - BBC

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13855203>

The Syria Files - Wikileaks

<http://wikileaks.org/Syria-Files.html>

New York Times' reports on Syria

<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/syria/index.html>

Article on Syria - Foreign Affairs

<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/137339/daniel-byman/preparing-for-failure-in-syria>