



Master's Degree in International Public Administration



«An overview of Syrian Crisis - The establishment of Islamic State- UN's response».

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Abstract

The dissertation deals with the civil war in Syria, which has been raging in the country in recent years. A civil war, which has a catalytic effect on the wider region of the Middle East, and wants to take up this issue, which is very important by itself. During the dissertation, information was collected about the Syrian state in general, its relations with neighboring countries, and in particular how we came to this civil war and the aspirations of the country's president through this ongoing conflict. The data were collected from the international articles in official journals, newspapers and various other websites, evaluated and processed and we came up with what is considered the most important and will be the main body of the conclusions. The dissertation also analyzes the establishment of ISIS during this conflict and the impact this caliphate had to the region. Lastly, the response of United Nations and the efforts that were made to resolve the crisis is highlighted.

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Introduction

SYRIA (HISTORY - GENERAL INFORMATION)

Syria is a Middle East country that stretches between the Euphrates River, the Arab Desert and the Mediterranean Sea. Its area is 185,180 km² and has a population of 22,505,000. Bordering on the north with Turkey, on the east with Iraq, on the south with Jordan, on the southwest with Israel and Lebanon and on the northwest with the Mediterranean Sea. Its capital is Damascus. Syria was under French domination until 1946, when it became independent. In 1958 together with Egypt formed the United Arab Republic, from which left in 1961 and became an independent state. In 1967, after the loss at the "six days" war between Syria and Israel, Israel occupied a large part of the Golan Heights, which it holds until today.

Syria is ruled by the Arab Socialist Party of Baath since 1963, which has been institutionalized by the country's constitution. President of Syria until 2000 was Hafez al-Assad, who was succeeded by his son, Bashar al-Assad who is in power until today.

Since 2011 Syria is facing a violent civil war. It began as a form of demonstrations after the Arab Spring, which was broadcast from country to country across the southern Mediterranean¹. However, the violent crackdown on Syria's protests has resulted in an armed rebellion and then a civil war between Sunni guerrillas and the government. It is estimated that to date, more than 80,000 Syrians have died of this conflict, half of them were civilians. In 2013 the government was accused of using chemicals against the civilian population, an act that upset the international community². This has led the UN Security Council to send an Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-UN joint investigative team who have actually detected the existence of chemical weapons in the country³ but have not found evidence of their use. Immediate consequence of the civil war that is ravaging and deserting the country is the massive outflow of thousands of Syrian refugees, who are

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Syrian-Civil-War>

² <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Timeline-of-Syrian-Chemical-Weapons-Activity>

³ <https://www.opcw.org/>

heading in every direction, seeking protection and security for themselves and their families.

The opposition in Syria, in March 2012, created the Syrian National Coalition government as a counterbalance to the government of Bashar al-Assad. It is worth noting, however, that as a legitimate government with international representation power is considered the one of Bashar al-Assad⁴. But since the opposition does not recognize it, it created the Syrian National Council⁵ as a way to counter Assad's government. This move made it possible for the Western world to recognize this newly established government as the only legitimate and able to rule the country, regardless of the fact that this coalition does not hold the positions of state power. The coalition of the "second" government has also been recognized by the Arab League, which includes 22 members from North Africa and the Near East.

Regarding its population, Syria consists of 90.3% of Arabs and of various ethnicities such as Kurds, Armenians, and others. The official language is Arabic, although in some regions the Kurdish, Armenian and Aramaic⁶ dialects are also spoken. In terms of religion, 74% are predominantly Muslim, and only 10% of the entire population of the country are Christians.

The country's economy was generally in a moderate level for the Middle East, but the government had begun a reform program with privatizations, liberalization of economic policies, opening of private banks, consolidation of multiple exchange rates, rising prices on some subsidized data, and finally establishing a stock exchange in Damascus. The rhythm of the positive figures for the country's energy economy stalled sharply after the international embargo on the Syrian economy in 2012, due to the civil war.

⁴ <https://statelegitimacy.com>

⁵ <http://syriancouncil.org/>

⁶ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html>

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to present the causes of all events occurring in Syria and neighboring states, to describe the establishment of ISIS and the impact this had to the Syrian crisis, to examine the attitude of the great powers and other players on Syria as it developed after the Arab Spring, and finally present the response of United Nations and the efforts made to solve this issue.

Chapter 1: The Crisis

The road to crisis

The explosion of the "Arab Spring" as an action to achieve political reform has quickly moved from the original North African region to the Middle East and, as expected, it has emerged in Syria, which witnessed the revolutionary trend in March 2011. Previously, the wider region and especially the country had experienced a drought, which was one of the worst in its history, resulting in a large number of farmers and ordinary citizens leaving the countryside and moving to the north⁷. According to an American study, the climate change observed and triggered a record drought in Syria in 2006-2010, played a key role in the breakdown of the turbulent civil war in 2011, which continues to this day in the region, and which paved the way for the emergence of the extreme ISIS Islamists in Syria and in neighboring Iraq⁸. Clearly, under no circumstances it is stressed that the main cause was climate change, and especially the drought was a factor contributing to the deterioration of the situation.

The situation was seen as a good opportunity to demonstrate the demands of political reforms, but what distinguished this case from Tunisia and Egypt, for example, was the armed and more dynamic appearance of the protesters. According to a NATO report "The evolution of the situation in Syria

⁷ Ranjit Gupta, "Understanding the war in the Syria and the roles of external players: Way out of the Quagmire?" The Round Table, 2016, Vol 105, No1, p. 29-41

⁸ <http://news247.gr/eidiseis/epistimi/gia-poio-logo-ksepase-o-emfulios-sth-syria-sumfwna-me-toys-amerikanous-o-rolos-ths-kshrasias.3336192.html>

has its roots in people from poor rural areas now living in an urban environment far enough from the support network."⁹ Clearly the first issue that arises is the possibility of finding these weapons, since during their movement the armament was something that was not yet happened. The reality is that both the neighboring region and the wider region, particularly Turkey and Saudi Arabia, have immediately begun to supply weapons to Islamic militants to face Assad¹⁰.

Syria, under the absolute dictatorship of Assad, originally of the elder Hafiz Al-Assad, and then of the son of Bassar Al Assad, which began in 1970, had formed a stable political environment. In fact, and contrary to the situation in the neighboring Arab states, a more liberal system has been established, which managed to harmoniously combine the living of Alevi (13%), Christians (9%), Drouzas (3%) and Sunni Arabs (65%). The Sunnis played an important role in shaping the Syrian government by taking on supreme and sensitive positions. Nevertheless, the Alevites were the ones who ruled although an apparent balance had been achieved.

Regarding the Syrian population, from 3 million in 1946 it rose to around 23 million in 2011. It should be noted that Syria prior to the war was a country that accepted a huge amount of refugees (500,000 Palestinians, 100,000 Lebanese, 1 million Iraqis mainly Christians and Sunnis), but the country was incapable to offer them the necessary for their survival. In addition, the country under the Assad government experienced a significant economic blast and GDP growth, with headline revenue rising from \$ 2069 in 1980 to \$ 6375 in 2010¹¹. According to an article published in the Avicenna Journal of Medicine, these remarkable changes resulted to an accessibility to public health as a consequence of the government's efforts to bring medical care to the countryside¹². But beyond health and education, important goals have been achieved. During the 1980s, full access to primary education for all boys was achieved for the first time and 85% for girls. In 1981, 42% of adults were

⁹ NATO Parliamentary Assembly, *"Regional and global implications of the Syrian civil war: What role for NATO?"*, 2014, p. 8

¹⁰ Ranjit Gupta, *"Understanding the war in the Syria and the roles of external players: Way out of the Quagmire?"* The Round Table, 2016, VOI 105, No1, p. 29-41

¹¹ [http://www.indexmundi.com/syria/gdp_per_capita_\(ppp\).html](http://www.indexmundi.com/syria/gdp_per_capita_(ppp).html)

¹² http://www.avicennajmed.com/temp/AvicennaJMed2351-5274286_143902.pdf

illiterate, which dropped drastically in 1991 and almost eradicated because of the government's efforts¹³.

Combined with the above, the formation of the economic situation in conjunction with the political stability of society has strengthened the Baath status of Assad. This situation allowed the regime to cope with the initial situation without major and significant repercussions, which was feasible by mid-2012, so that the increasing and non-discriminatory use of force derailed the situation with consequences that may not even be possible today to be precisely defined.

Regarding the situation within Syria, it should be pointed out that the spread of the events of the Arab Spring with the removal of Ben Ali and Hosni Boubacar gave rise to suspicions and the basis for the removal of Assad by power. In Syrian society, some middle-class Syrians, especially in Damascus and Aleppo, and the business class in general in the major cities were worried about losing stability and saw Assad as their only hope of making reforms and changes in the country's political system that could be achieved in a gentler way than in the North African countries. But these expectations have begun to diminish as favoritism and erosion have been expanded through a fast-paced system¹⁴. Therefore, the internal situation despite stability in the sense that for more than 40 years was ruled by the Baath Party in the authoritarian way of Assad but on the other hand the inability to deal with the serious situation caused in the country due to the long period of drought in combined with the collapse of expectations for substantial changes, has led to a deterioration of the position of Basar Al Assad at the very moment when the Arab spring began to appear in the Middle East region and as expected made Assad as the main reason and the recipient of all subversive activities which now began to manifest themselves in the slums.

¹³ <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-truth-about-syria-a-manufactured-war-against-an-independent-country/5527668>

¹⁴ Hank Johnston, "*Theory, Method, and the Mechanism of Framing: Reflections on the Syrian Civil War and Palestinian Intifada*", *Civil Wars*, 2015 Vol. 17, No. 2, p. 274, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2015.1070457>

From the standpoint of the regime, despite the efforts it made to address the situation and bring the desired reforms, the situation in the country began to deteriorate significantly in mid-2012, partly due to the rising desertion of Sunni soldiers who began to organize resistance against the regime. At the same time in the east of the country racial groups supported the struggle against Assad, mainly because of the fact that Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey as well as the United States and the West with their allies had promoted large amounts of money and weapons to deserters and other Islamist groups from abroad that had crept in Syria and thus had a substantial incentive for their struggle against the regime¹⁵. Besides the internal situation of the country, we also have the involvement of foreign states that have sought to intervene in the shape of Syria so that they can pursue their goals in order to achieve their national interests. The main characteristic of course is that in the early stages of their intervention this was made by dealers, which leads us to form a "Proxy War" framework that was continued by some states or other states, such as Turkey, made a visible, even limited, involvement. There was also support from the Sunni Iraqi militants who crossed the border initially formed the core that later transformed into the Islamic State (ISIS)¹⁶. All these countries saw the revolution as an opportunity in order to achieve their goal of removing Assad's status from their geopolitical plans. External intervention was therefore, if not the most important, a cause that aggravated the situation and led Syria to a long and destructive war, with effects that even escaped the country's borders and created complications in the wider regional environment. However, the reasons that formed a framework against the regime and led to the involvement of foreign powers are rooted in the 1970s and are mainly due to the differentiated policy that the country has decided to pursue in relation to other Arab countries. Thus, following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Syria had developed a strong alliance with Iran while maintaining its strategic alliance with Russia, but Assad's biggest mistake was that Syria had full control of Lebanon's policy being the main route of proliferation and presence of the Iranian

¹⁵ Ranjit Gupta, "Understanding the war in the Syria and the roles of external players: Way out of the Quagmire?" *The Round Table*, 2016, VOL 105, No1, p. 29-41

¹⁶ [https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR122_IS_REPORT_Combined_140115\(new\).pdf](https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR122_IS_REPORT_Combined_140115(new).pdf)

Revolution to the Levante region¹⁷. The passions and dislikes of the past made their appearance again influencing and shaping the current situation accordingly. International relations even in the Arab world are characterized on the basis of interests irrespective of any theological and ideological-political similarities¹⁸. So, despite the initial discussions on developing bilateral relations between Syria and Iraq, the situation has changed rapidly and the Iraqis have accused Syria of undergoing a coup d'etat in order to overthrow Saddam, a fact that has turned Assad, the elder, with Iran, which has further strengthened them over time¹⁹.

On the other hand, analyzing the relationship with Saudi Arabia, it is based on the strong ideological-political differentiation that existed between the two actors. The secular character, socialism, unity of society and Pan-Arabic nationalism, which were the main pillars of the Baath Party, was the absolute aura for the Saudi-Arab regime²⁰. The Saudis could not accept the situation, that in Syria a small minority of Alevi could rule for a long time the vast majority of Sunni people in the country. Yet in its foreign policy, Syria has developed relations, as has been said before, with Iran, a permanent and big rival of Saudi Arabia²¹. Increasing material support from Iran has been a vital element in strengthening the status of Assad. Iran has provided tremendous financial and military assistance, plenty of oil supplies, as well as the services of a large number of Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps officers as counselors on organizing, training and business in the battlefield²².

Also, Lebanon's control of Syria, even with the deployment of military forces for the country's security, has shaped a hostile framework of conduct that has led many Saudi Arabians to fight the regime.

¹⁷ Ranjit Gupta, "Understanding the war in the Syria and the roles of external players: Way out of the Quagmire?" The Round Table, 2016, VOL 105, No1, p. 29-41

¹⁸ https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/FP_20181116_islam_as_statecraft.pdf

¹⁹ Ranjit Gupta, "Understanding the war in the Syria and the roles of external players: Way out of the Quagmire?" The Round Table, 2016, VOL 105, No1, p. 29-41

²⁰ Ranjit Gupta, "Understanding the war in the Syria and the roles of external players: Way out of the Quagmire?" The Round Table, 2016, VOL 105, No1, p. 29-41

²¹ http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_4_No_12_October_2014/10.pdf

²² Ranjit Gupta, "Understanding the war in the Syria and the roles of external players: Way out of the Quagmire?" The Round Table, 2016, VOL 105, No1, p. 29-41

Trying to describe the complex situation, we see that it consists of different pieces on many levels, but they play an important role in the final result. Beginning with the long drought, it has experienced new problems in the country's governance since it has had to cope with the number of refugees fleeing Syria. Government incapability has created tensions and disfavours and a dislike for the regime which, although it has ruled for decades, did not seem worthy of expectations. The Arab Spring event and its move to Syria triggered more radical reforms and the regime reacted violently and nervously. Abroad, however, the other Arab countries that were hostile to Syria because of its relationship with Iran and Russia and its influence on Lebanon had a first-class opportunity to intervene to reach their goal which was the removal of the Ba'athist regime of the Alevi from power.

But Syria also has an important strategic value that stems from its geographical location. If we want to outline or better define the context in which the Syrian crisis is taking place in recent years, we will have to travel almost a century earlier on May 16, 1916, where we have the Sykes-Picot agreement. The deal, officially known as the Asia Minor Agreement, was signed in London by diplomats Mark Sykes and Francois Zorzi Picot, established the fate and political class in the Middle East. A century ago, the soon-to-be victorious forces wishing to divide the region (then part of the Ottoman Empire) drew a "line in the sand" (as James Barr called it), which stretched from the port of Akko in northern Palestine to Kirkuk in northern Iraq, on the border with Iran. All regions north of this line, namely Lebanon and Syria, would go to France. The areas in the south - Palestine, the West Bank and Iraq - in Britain, which was mainly seeking to protect British interests in the Suez Canal, the basic naval route to British India. At the same time, however, Britain was negotiating with the Arabs who had risen up against the British and the French against the Ottoman Empire - first with Mr. Sharif Hussein bin Ali of Mecca. But under Sykes-Picot, Syria now belonged to France. So one of the two sides would be "thrown" and it was clear which side was the weaker: the Arabs who were fighting for their independence. The secret agreement negotiated by Sykes-Picot led to the creation of states that served the geopolitical interests of the great colonial powers and did not reflect the social, religious and ethnic realities of the

region²³. Thus, a framework was formulated for the Middle East countries to meet the geostrategic and national interests of the forces of the time, but without taking into consideration their commitments to Arab independence and the specificities of the region since everything was shared and settled under the law of the mighty.

Today as you can see from the East or the West, the North or the South, the country is in the unpleasant position of being surrounded by strong forces. The rich and fertile soil in the north, while in the South it approaches the fertile valley of the Nile, while at the same time the country is located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers that provide the opportunity for growth and prosperity. Therefore, any force seeking to control this rich region necessarily passes through Syria where blood and conflicts are part of history, tribes mingle, religions are complicated, and goods move in an uncontrollable and violent way many times²⁴.

Another dimension of Syria's value comes from the energy point of view because, although it is not a major oil producer, it is close to several of the major producers and for a long time is the center of the pipelines connecting the Gulf and the Mediterranean. Syria's energy security has faced a number of challenges as a result of the conflicts and sanctions imposed by the US and the EU. Disasters caused by energy infrastructures, including oil and gas pipelines and the electricity transmission network, have prevented exploitation, development, production and transfer of the country's energy capabilities. Syria, which was the leading producer country in the Eastern Mediterranean in oil and gas production, now sees production dropping dramatically. Syria can no longer export oil and as a result the revenues from the energy sector have dropped significantly. Prior to the crisis, Syria produced 383,000 barrels of oil a day and 316 million cubic feet of gas a day, resulting in oil and gas revenues accounting for 20% of public revenue²⁵.

²³ <http://www.tovima.gr/world/article/?aid=803218>

²⁴ <https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/geopolitics-syrian-civil-war>,

²⁵ https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis_includes/countries_long/Syria/syria.pdf

According to Alasdair Drysdale of the Australian National University, Syria's geopolitical interest is remarkable and important beyond its relative population, its extent, its resources and economic prosperity but mainly due to its placement in the middle of the Middle East. gives it a key role in resolving any disagreements occurring in the Middle East region²⁶.

In our effort to complement the puzzles image, we should add the remarkable geothermal value of the country, which, due to its placement and energy corridor as it is located in the heart of the Middle East, gives a significant dimension in the value of Syria. It is now easy to understand that the control of Syria will confer on anyone who has redeemed it significant benefits that escape the declared religious aspirations or differences and even political ambitions.

External Drivers of Syrian Conflict

As stated above, Syria's strategic position at the eastern edge of the Mediterranean justifiably attracts international interest, leading international system actors such as the US, Russia, China, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran to reckon with forces on the international scene. Their aim is to take advantage of the situation by increasing their power and expand their influence to the international stature.

In the complicated international scene around the Syrian crisis, we can distinguish two coalition countries that try either to maintain their foundations in the Syrian region or to increase existing ones, even to create new ones. On the one hand, the only countries that support it are Russia and China, which have repeatedly vetoed UN resolutions to impose sanctions or external intervention in Syria, and Iran, indicating that it reinforces arms and fighters. Russia supports the existing Syrian regime because it has secured an agreement on the mooring of its ships in Tartus, a port located on the southern coast of the country. Its collapse would mean its exclusion from the Eastern Mediterranean. Similarly, Iran supports Damascus as there is a dogmatic affinity between the Shiites of Iran and the Syrian Alaouites, sending Hezbollah and Shiite billions

²⁶ <http://www.thenation.com/article/why-push-syrian-intervention-about-more-just-assad/>

of dollars a year to help the Bashar al-Assad regime in western Syria. But the most important reason is that with this alliance, it seeks to balance the pressure Syria receives from the US and the rest of the Arab states in the region²⁷.

On the other hand, states such as Turkey, the United States, the Western countries and the Arab states of the Gulf, consider the fall of the Assad regime as the only opportunity to change power associations and increase their influence on the regional subsystem of the Middle East. Although they are in favor of overthrowing the Assad regime, they do not want to be involved in the Syrian civil war and are limited to financial sanctions and diplomatic pressure. In addition, due to the fragmentation and heterogeneity of the Syrian counterparts, the US avoids supplying them with weapons, as they did in Libya, because they do not want them to end up in the hands of extremist Islamists who will turn them against Israel. Since the beginning of the crisis, Turkey has been trying to set up friendly zones in Syria's chaos of war, hoping for future territorial annexations from the possible dissolution of the Syrian state. On the other hand, for more than two years, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), based in southeastern Turkey and northern Iraq, has worked with its own local subsidiary to establish Rojava, the western province of Kurdistan. Jordan, whose intelligence services have been operating in southern Syria for years, has approached local fighters and tribal members in an effort to keep the Islamic State away. And some in Israel are considering working with the Syrian Druze community, parts of which are on the border of the Golan Heights. At a regional level, Saudi Arabia and Qatar also support groups in both northern and southern Syria.

As most of the world watches with dismay the dissolution of Syria, the regional forces are busy trying to claim spheres of influence in the country in the name of security, peace, and humanitarian aid. Once again, it turns out that a country with damaged infrastructure, with numerous victims, with communal, religious and economic cracks, with overwhelmed and desperate people, is actually becoming a part of foreign interests. The absence of institutions and

²⁷ <https://carnegieendowment.org/2013/08/27/iran-s-unwavering-support-to-assad-s-syria-pub-52779>

solid central government has the effect of increasing its dependencies, limiting its power, becoming vulnerable to foreign protectors, willing to serve foreign interests, weak in the protection of its rights, powerless to defend its sovereignty. The plans of the foreign powers for the Syrian state under collapse have been more or less visible in the years of the civil war. Specifically:

a. Turkey

Since 2002, Turkey has prioritized good relations with Damascus, arguing that areas in northern Syria were part of what they called Turkey's "natural hinterland". Prior to the start of the civil war there was a relationship of friendship and co-operation between Turkey and Syria, which was the result of the successful implementation of the Davutoglu Doctrine, which consists in exercising a hegemonic policy on behalf of Turkey, targeting mainly countries of its immediate region²⁸. By wishing to maximize its power and to maximize the exploitation of its forces, Turkey, within the framework of the above-mentioned Doctrine, should cultivate close relations with its neighboring countries and develop political-diplomatic and economic relations. In its effort, Turkey put forward factors such as the common Islamic religion, common history and traditions. However, in order for Davutoglu to be successful, a precondition is the existence of an environment of stability and balance between Turkey and those countries that wanted to be part of its sphere of influence. Syria's bilateral relations, shortly before the upheavals broke out, had reached an excellent level, to the point of conducting joint military exercises, signing public works agreements, and planning to increase their economic and commercial transactions.

As part of this logic in April 2011, senior Justice and Development Party (AKP) executives met in Ankara to discuss the riots in Syria, and initially, their will was to support the Bashar al-Assad government²⁹. To that end, Recep Tayyip Erdogan - the prime minister and current president - sent two trusted

²⁸ https://www.eliamep.gr/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/%CE%9A%CE%95%CE%99%CE%9C%CE%95%CE%9D%CE%9F-%CE%95%CE%A1%CE%93%CE%91%CE%A3%CE%99%CE%91%CE%A3-8_2010_loGrigoriadis1.pdf

²⁹ <http://www.foreignaffairs.gr/articles/70179/aaron-stein/i-ekselissomeni-stratigiki-tis-toyrkias-gia-tin-syria?page=show>

advisors to try to persuade Assad to make superficial democratic reforms to appease protesters. Turkish diplomacy was alarmed because Ankara did not want to lose an important ally in the region and offered the Syrian President even a thorough crisis management plan that would allow him to retain his power. But when the rebellion began to take uncontrollable dimensions, the AKP government changed its line of navigation and made stringent recommendations to Syria, and even hosted Syrian opposition conferences on its territory³⁰. With this attitude, Turkey was now showing that it began to align with the views of Western allies wishing to gain their favor in the event of intervention and control of Syria, but also the favor of the counterparts in the event of a fall of Assad.

Initially, Turkey allowed the safe passage of weapons and fighters, many of whom were escorts of the Syrian army, in various provinces of Syria. The rebels, who became widely known as the Free Syrian Army (FSA), found refuge in Turkey, which gave them the right to use as a basis for their actions a special refugee camp just across Turkey's border with Syria. Later, they would be given the permission to establish their presence in the border areas of Turkey. In addition, Ankara was willing to organize and support an exiled opposition and sought to strengthen the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's party in order to become the new Syrian government with which it maintained friendly relations and better served its interests. Ultimately, however, this policy did not pay off and contributed to the disintegration of the emerging guerrilla alliance, which consists of heterogeneous groups with conflicting interests. Thus, as of November 2011, Turkey began to advocate an international intervention in Syria. Western and Arab states, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, felt that the Assad regime needed more effective pressure, which did not exclude the armed intervention. Like the French and Arab governments, Turkey has also advocated the creation of a neutral zone with a ban on airspace in areas along its border with Syria, the creation of which would require the destruction of Syrian airspace and military installations.

³⁰[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/599389/EPRS_BRI\(2017\)599389_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/599389/EPRS_BRI(2017)599389_EN.pdf)

Ankara's ultimate goal and wishful thinking was that the guerrillas would use this safe zone to establish a rival government with that of Assad in Damascus, which the international community would in the long run recognize as the official Syrian government and give it a seat on the negotiating table. And these efforts were fruitless because the US did not want to intervene militarily and the Arab states except Qatar did not agree with Turkey's attempt to strengthen the Muslim Brotherhood because it did not serve their own interests.

Since the end of spring 2012, the Turkish government has decided to diversify its tactics. Realizing that its border strategy with the creation of the safe area mentioned above did not bring any results, the Turkish Intelligence Agency began organizing a guerrilla attack against the city of Aleppo. In the course of this battle, guerrilla brigades within the FSA (Syrian Free Army) began to rely heavily on suicide attacks by Jabhat al-Nusra, an al-Qaeda organization in Syria, in areas under Syrian rule. Turkey and Qatar wanting the overthrow of the Assad government approached al-Nusra directly, believing that the guerrilla group would serve their plans and that they could curb it.

The deeper cause for Ankara's move was that al-Nusra would be a good counterweight to the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) active in the Kurdish majority areas in northern Syria and has ties to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) which has been known to fight in a bloody rebellion against the Turkish state since 1984. But when in July 2012 Assad withdrew almost all of its troops from the three Kurdish majority regions - Afrin, Kobane and Jazira - the PYD declared soon its autonomy in the area known as Rojava, and Ankara was afraid of witnessing the birth of a state under the leadership of the PKK on its border. In response, it stopped assistance and supply missions in the Kurdish enclaves and allegedly allowed the FSA and al-Nusra forces to use its territory to attack Jazira's outskirts in November 2012. Also, in 2014, Turkey allowed al-Nusra and other rebel brigades to use its territory to attack Kasab, an Armenian majority city in northwestern Syria. For all these reasons, Turkey just in early 2014, under increasing US pressure, changed its attitude and formally declared al-Nusra as a terrorist organization, although it still had ties with it.

Another issue that has emerged from the Syrian crisis is that of the southern borders of Turkey, which prove perforated. The Battle against the Islamic State (ISIS) appeared to be linked to the 560-mile line that separates Turkey from Syria and the US and Russia have often urged Ankara to seal its southern borders so that the radical groups with supplies and volunteers wishing to join their side. Turkish officials have responded to these calls and some have argued that border closure is impossible³¹. The truth is that ISIS has occupied significant parts of the territory on the Syrian side, and the guarding of Turkey's southern borders would require a huge number of security personnel and would be extremely costly for the Turkish government. And most importantly the closure of the border would be a drag on the movement of refugees.

Undoubtedly, Turkey is one of those forces with the largest interference, apparently and unintelligibly, in the Syrian civil war. The interests at stake are many and hope, after the end of the war, that power relations have changed to its advantage.

b. Russia

The military alliance between Russia and Syria has deep roots in time since it dates back to the Cold War era, since after the Six Days War of 1967, Russia undertook the reconstruction and rearmament of the Syrian army, which it supplied with the most modern for the time. In return, Syria offered in 1971 the naval base of Tartus, which is today the only naval base of Russia in the Mediterranean and its sole base in the Middle East.

Russia (along with Iran) has provided the Syrian regime with full support, including direct military intervention, which allowed Assad to retain power and regain momentum in his country, often wrecking any efforts for peace talks. The factors that prompted the Kremlin's active involvement in the multi-annual Syrian crisis were diverse. Since the beginning of the crisis, Moscow has consistently and firmly opposed international intervention to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, arguing that the conflict must be resolved through

³¹ <http://foreignaffairs.gr/articles/70805/ryan-gingeras/i-toyrkia-peran-ton-synoron>

negotiations and that Assad should be involved in any transitional arrangements leading to a new government. In Putin's view, the lawless, post-Kaddafi Libya is the best example of foreign powers for the dangers of international intervention. Libya has become an exporter of weapons, warriors and refugees to its neighbors, so foreign intervention should also be avoided in Syria in order not to have the same painful results³².

Initially, we can say that Moscow appears to benefit from arms exports to Syria and, furthermore, it is vital for its interests to maintain its access to the naval base in the Mediterranean port of Tartus, while the construction of a second base is rumored either in the city of Jableh (Gabala) or in the existing naval installation of Minat Al Bayda. We should not forget that in 2011 Syria was the world's second-largest buyer of Russian weapons after China, and the massive Russian arms embassy in Syria continued unabated until July 2012, when Russia officially announced its suspension.

Putin has another incentive to support the Assad regime. The rise of Islamic extremism seems to concern Moscow (as well as Washington), as compact Muslim populations are living within the Russian territory³³. The eventual collapse of the Syrian state awakens distressing memories of the recent past about Russia when Chechnya tried to break out of Russia in the North Caucasus, an effort that was violently suppressed by a bloody civil war and anti-expulsion operations from 1999 to the 2009. Both the conflicts in Chechnya and the conflicts in Syria have fueled and found ground for action by extremist Sunni Islamic groups. Putin is not ready to accept an intervention that could lead to the dissolution of the Syrian state and risk creating a situation similar to that in Afghanistan in the 1990s when the warring groups of extremists fought each other and created a fertile ground for the "global jihad". Putin, in order to strengthen the seriousness of his arguments on Syria's failure to intervene in order to contain as much as possible Sunni extremism, reminds that Moscow was on the side of the US in the battle with the Taliban in

³² <http://foreignaffairs.gr/articles/69250/fiona-hill/giati-o-poytin-stirizei-ton-asant?page=show>

³³ <http://www.foreignaffairs.gr/articles/69250/fiona-hill/giati-o-poytin-stirizei-ton-asant?page=show>

Afghanistan after 11 September. For the same reason, Russia maintains close relations with Shiite Iran, which acts as a counterweight to the Sunni forces.

Russia's intervention in favor of the Assad government creates further friction in its relations with Turkey, which invokes Russian violations of its national airspace, further aggravating regional imbalances. It is well known that Turkey is seeking a change of status in Syria, and that it does not want the creation of a Kurdish state for any reason, and Russian intervention is a hindrance to its plans. Of course, Turkey cannot handle a wider confrontation with Russia, but at a local level the current correlations are favorable and tend to become more favorable due to the "adoption" of Ankara's concerns by NATO.

On March 14, 2016, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that he was withdrawing the "main part" of the Russian military forces he had developed in Syria six months ago. The reasons that led to this decision of the Russian leader are mostly of an economic nature. Although spending on military operations in Syria was not excessive, however, the demonstration of protests and strikes within the Russian country required the readjustment of Russian policy in Syria. The Russian state is facing serious financial problems, mainly due to the collapse of oil prices and the sanctions imposed on it by Western states. Thus, Russia will continue to maintain its ability to operate from the Khmeimim air base, at the southeast of Latakia, and from its long-established naval base in Tartus, for both of which Putin has promised to protect "from the earth, air and sea".

The Russian campaign in Syria has largely achieved its goals. He allowed the collapse of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government and allowed him to recover a good piece of land lost by his forces, mainly in the provinces of Idlib and Aleppo. In doing so, it has also secured its strategic interests, which are inextricably linked with the preservation of Tartus. In addition, the Syrian opposition was forced to accept the ceasefire that came into force on 27 February and strengthened Russia's position at the negotiating table with the West for the future of Syria. So the US was forced to abandon their initial position that peace talks were impossible until Assad stepped down.

Russia's withdrawal puts the issue of Syria on a new basis and rekindles the hope of maintaining the cease-fire and finding a solution³⁴.

c. Iran

Iran has close ties with the Arab Assad regime, both because of religion and military and political equilibrium in the region that it wants to preserve³⁵. At the same time is in the list of his allies also with Iraq, which after the withdrawal of the American troops in the subsequent elections elected Shiite Prime Minister. Thus, Iran-backed Hezbollah, with its base outside Lebanon, is active in the Qalamoun border region and in the Northern and Southern campaigns of the Assad regime. In addition, Iraqi and Afghan Shi'i militants have been arrested by Tehran against President Assad, in order to boost these campaigns. A prominent example of Iranian influence is the strengthening of favorable conditions for the operation and development of Syrian paramilitary forces through the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, which, according to some estimates, are now as large as the Syrian army. This adds to about \$ 6 billion in annual economic and energy support from Tehran, which helped sustain what remains of the Assad regime.

Iran's motivation for what, according to most estimates, is the largest foreign intervention in Syria, is to secure a safe arms gang in Hezbollah in Lebanon, maintain a presence in the Golan heights to attack Israel, and ensure that what is left of the Assad regime follows Iran's bets.

d. USA

President Obama had made it clear from the outset that he did not want a military intervention in Syria³⁶, because he had fresh US involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan and the problems created by the prolonged presence of troops in these countries³⁷. This policy was criticized very much as it was believed to have favored Assad's stay in power but also the strengthening of the Islamic

³⁴ <http://www.foreignaffairs.gr/articles/70735/kimberly-marten-kai-rajan-menon/eksetelesthi-i-apostoli-toy-poytin>

³⁵ <http://www.foreignaffairs.gr/articles/70458/andrew-j-tabler/to-neo-megalo-paixnidi?page=show>

³⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-obama-war-idUSBRE97U0AP20130831>

³⁷ https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/ia/INTA92_1_05_Krieg.pdf

state (ISIS). The US reluctance to provide ground forces in Syria resulted in time for the jihadists to be empowered and train terrorists, whose mission was to act abroad³⁸. Even after the ISIS terrorist attacks, the US did not intervene as it is believed that it has reached a time when the other NATO allies should also take on their share and engage more actively in military operations. In this effort, they also found the Kurdish forces in Iraq and Syria as allies, who are very effective in a mountain struggle but are lagging behind when they are away from their land, and there is also the great issue of religion. The Sunni in the territories released by the Kurds feel they are threatened by the Kurdish expansionism, and there is a fear that these fighters will ally with ISIS to expel the Kurds. The only US military intervention after the terrorist attacks in Europe is the air raids in August and September 2014, as the US leadership continued to believe that the solution to the war is in the hands of Assad. So it can be said that the change in the US policy and their involvement, even with air strikes, was the result of an attempt to defeat ISIS, which ultimately benefited Assad, as he found allies to fight against his counterparts.

In the Syrian crisis, the United States is striving to approach the whole issue through partnerships with surrounding countries. They wanted to see it as a total action by many states intervening in a country's civil war, so that only the US would not be stigmatized. America's approach was through Turkey and Israel, which are two states that have traditionally maintained excellent relations with them. The US does not hide it from wanting to overthrow Assad, but they are trying to do it indirectly. They are trying to bridge relations between Turkey and Israel because they believe they will play a decisive role in tackling the overthrow of Syria by the opposition. At the same time, Washington has undertaken to coordinate regional forces (Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Jordan), whose conflicting policies are likely to lead to the weakening of the Syrian opposition. If Turkey is able to find them with Israel, it can affect it in rebuilding its relations with Syria in the pre-Assad or post-Assad period. But to do so, all the prerequisites for the transition from the current government to a national salvation government, representing all the religions and ethnic groups

³⁸ <http://www.foreignaffairs.gr/articles/70601/barak-mendelsohn/diairei-kai-basileye-stin-syria-kai-to-irak>

of the country, should be created without trying to punish individuals from the existing regime, who did not participate in the crimes. This would lead to an even more generalized civil war, which the international community could not handle.

On the other hand, the US is trying to weaken the role played by Iran and Hezbollah, because Syria maintains privileged relations with them. The Syrian conflict, which in the course of time is becoming more and more complex and clearly more complicated, has gradually begun to take on the characteristics of a political and religious confrontation, not so much about what is happening within Syria, but also about how much it affects the area of M. East in general. The United States and Russia appear to be facing a civil war, an emerging state, that of Kurdistan and a domino for changing borders, if a more general conflict occurs in the region. That is why Russia and China first used the right of veto at the Security Council in October 2011. On February 4, 2012, these states vetoed a second time in a draft resolution on Syria, the who advocated a political solution to the Syrian crisis. On 16 February 2012 the European Parliament called for a resolution to condemn the second veto of Russia and China. The formation of the two camps against the Syrian crisis was now apparent. The two formerly superpowers, the United States and Russia, were reunited and led to a position on a subject after a long cessation of their confrontation, from the end of the Cold War onwards. In total. China and Russia have made a 4-time veto on this issue, a fact unprecedented in the history of the United Nations.

e. The Arab Gulf States

The Arab states of the Gulf, although they have no territorial ground in the Syrian region, have come to the side of the United States and the western powers desiring the fall of the Assad regime. Their main motivation is to somehow offset the power of Shi'a Iran, which is a rising regional power. Thus, they seek to strengthen their influence in Syria by supporting Turkish and Jordanian efforts to equip rebel groups. When the US president, Barack Obama, decided in the summer of 2012 not to moderate Syrian opposition, the Arab Gulf countries intervened to immediately fund Islamist and moderate

groups in Syria. Unfortunately, however, several of these funds came to the hands of extremists, who quickly spread to the areas controlled by the opposition in Syria.

Concerned about the rise of extremists, Gulf Arab countries like Qatar and Saudi Arabia have publicly supported US, Turkish and Jordanian efforts in 2014 to end support for Islamists and jihadists in Syria. However, in practice, things are totally different, since Qatar and Saudi Arabia have only been making money on their way to Syria. It has not been established who the recipients of this money are, but it seems that the Gulf countries support and finance mainly moderate Islamic groups while they tolerate the co-operation of these factions with jihadists such as Ahrar al-Sham and Nusra in Jaysh Al Fateh. This group has proved a huge challenge for the Assad regime in northern and southern Syria.

Riant, together with Ankara and Doha, soon realized that the Syrian leader's withdrawal, either by force or by negotiation, could not have been achieved without the existence of a more coherent Syrian opposition that could strengthen the position and to be accepted in the international arena. The Syrian opposition is a complex formula involving various political, religious and armed organizations. The main organ of the Syrian opposition is the Syrian National Council, which is based in Constantinople, and is characterized by a similar internal heterogeneity and fragmentation. The predominant component of the Syrian National Council is the Muslim Brotherhood of Syria, which is linked to that of Egypt. The Free Syrian Army, a patchwork of armed groups of low coherence with partisan features, is a component of the Syrian National Council but is not controlled by it. In his ranks there are Syrian opposition and deserters of the Syrian Army, as well as foreign elements: Libyans who had taken part in the uprising against Gaddafi, Islamic Arabs from Middle East countries and groups of jihadists associated with al-Qaida. The common point of reference linking these disparate elements is the Sunni doctrine and the goal of overthrowing Assad, but beyond that there is neither a single political line nor a single strategy in military operations. Until now, the heterogeneous tendencies within the Syrian opposition have not been met, and there is no

commonly accepted plan for the form of the state and the power of power in the post-Assad era.

Of course, the unification of the huge chaos of the Syrian opposition is an extremely difficult task, and any attempt to unite politicians and guerrillas from the start of the uprisings in Syria has failed miserably. Saudi Arabia continues its efforts for a more homogenized Syrian opposition, always with Turkey and Qatar, by stepping up arms and money transfers to those rebel groups that show a more structured structure³⁹. So, if the Syrian government collapses and these groups take power, Saudi Arabia will have increased its influence significantly in Syria and will have acquired another ally at the regional level.

f. Israel

Israel, after the initial ambiguity of its attitude, has come to the conclusion that the fall of Assad is in his interest because it would bring about the collapse of the middle pole of the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah Shi'ite Shield, through it Hezbollah is supplied with military material. However, Israel takes note of the scenario formulated by Defense Minister and former Prime Minister Ehud Barak, according to which Assad could resort to the ultimate solution to an Israeli attack to cause a more general fire and to turn the Intra-Arab Syrian Civil War into a new Arab-Israeli war. Therefore, and with his constantly focused attention to Iran, Israel will avoid any military engagement with Syria, and will intervene only if there is a danger that the army arsenal or the missile army's missiles will end up in the hands of Hezbollah.

g. Proxy war

For many analysts the war in Syria is a proxy war⁴⁰. That is, it is a war that is not so much because it is the desire of local actors, but it is stimulated mainly by external actors and guilds. as we have already analyzed the regional forces, but also the US and the forces of Europe have at stake in the region

³⁹ <http://www.foreignaffairs.gr/articles/70629/bilal-y-saab/to-sxedio-tis-saoydikis-arabias-gia-tin-syria.htm>

⁴⁰ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/proxy-war>

and are trying in every way to influence developments to keep them. That is why we see that the external forces have been separated, equip each side that serves them and at the same time with various tricks trying to prevent (vetoing) the attainment of an agreement that they will not be able to control its outcome. This tactic was common during the Cold War, where the great powers did not come into direct confrontation because of the fear of nuclear detonation and were struggling with regional conflicts in weak states to influence and favor (gaining power) from international developments.

Something similar is also true of Syria. Assad has made Syrian status as the supporter of Sunni Fanaticism, which has succeeded in gaining military support from Russia and Iran⁴¹. After Assad suffered a series of military failures in 2012, he suggested as a justification the threat of the jihadists to persuade Russia and Iran to send more weapons, capital, but even military forces. Ultimately, these weapons were not only against the jihadists but also against all the enemies of the regime, namely Christians, Kurds and other local actors.

On the other hand, the Syrian guerrillas have managed to secure a corresponding financial and military assistance by taking money and arms from the Gulf states, presenting the conflict as a religious confrontation.

In a "war on dealers," a key element is that outside forces are not willing to be lost and keep those conflicts until they gain a strategic advantage. Therefore, one way to end such a war is when one side achieves an overwhelming power superiority and can defeat the other side militarily, or when both sides agree that it is in their best interests to cease fighting. Similarly, the conflict in Syria can only be resolved if a total winner is found, which seems extremely difficult, or if a mutual agreement is finally reached that will satisfy the powerful actors.

⁴¹ <http://www.foreignaffairs.gr/articles/70583/lionel-beehner/pos-leitoyrgoyn-oi-polemoi-dia-plireksoysion>

Internal Drivers of Syrian Conflict

a. Opposition Armed Groups (OAG)

The OAGs intent is to defeat the regime and to secure the removal of Assad from power, however since Russian intervention this aim appears to be almost entirely unattainable. Whilst the defeat of the regime is highly unlikely, the opposition feel that the removal of Assad through diplomatic means is a realistic possibility. However in the face of their continued losses, their focus has shifted to attempting to defend the territory they still retain and try to force a military stalemate to bring the regime to the negotiating table, whilst still retaining the negotiating strength they have. However it should be noted that despite their impressive gains early in the conflict, they have lost the momentum after the loss of Aleppo in 2016, their last stronghold in a major city. The Opposition is highly motivated in ensuring that the new talks with the regime during the current ceasefire are more productive than those that preceded it.

Enduring ceasefire agreements and peace talks are challenged due to divergent interests of regional and local actors and therefore is difficult to deliver a lasting peace settlement in Syria. The complex and occasionally conflicting agendas of multiple OAGs will continue to complicate a possible political solution to the Syrian conflict.

Militarily, OAGs cannot find common acceptable command structures and continue to execute decentralized operations. The establishment of “operation rooms” has given OAGs access to a larger pool of fighters, funding and equipment but also risks a loss of influence for individual groups with differing ideology. The lack of cohesion amongst opposition groups challenge cooperation efforts, but the anti-regime agenda make them overcome differing political or ideological goals in order to reach short-term objectives.

b. Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)

In July 2016 the Al-Nusra front rebranded itself and merged with other groups forming HTS which translates to Organization for the liberation of the Levant. It is also known as Al-Qaeda in Syria. This group is considered a

terrorist organization according to UNSC. Their intent is to defeat the regime and capture territory.

They represent one of the most capable Syrian opposition groups and were quick to establish themselves early in the conflict and as such still operate in considerable amounts of territory. When it suited, the group has co-operated with other opposition groups in key battles against regime forces.

Group became officially part of Al-Qaeda in 2012, has since renounced connections in 2016 leading to the rebranding from the Al-Nusra to HTS, move conducted to open it up to foreign assistance, and to be considered legitimate enough to be warranted a place at future negotiations. Split from Al-Qaeda is however considered to be in name only and has remained a registered terror group in the view of UNSC as well as a number of other countries.

In 2013, the group rejected and resisted ISIS attempts to integrate, bringing it into conflict between them. HTS has strong local recruitment and is seen by locals as the home-grown jihadist group in the region, as opposed to ISIS that is viewed by some Syrians as a foreign occupier.

c. Kurdish People's Protection Unit (YPG)

Syrian Kurds are the largest ethnic minority in Syria with an estimated population of 2 million people which equates to 9% of the total Syrian population. There are a number of Kurdish groups but the largest and most influential is the Kurdish People Protection Unit.

YPG is the least well-equipped faction in the Syrian civil war. The YPG has continued to carve out a self-declared autonomous region known as Rojava and has gained the trust of international allies in the fight against ISIS. Turkey considers the YPG, and its political wing, the PYD (People's republic), extensions of the PKK, who has been responsible for attacks within Turkey. The PKK is a recognized terrorist organization by Turkey, US and the EU.

The YPG are perceived as conducting themselves effectively with an established end state and a pragmatic approach. Since August 2016, the YPG has broadened external support to accept aid from Russia, with which it

coordinates some of its operations. The group also has expanded its internal partnership by joining the Syrian Democratic Forces, a multiethnic alliance of militias created to fight ISIS in eastern Syria. YPG forces have increased the area under their control by about 30%. If the PYD is able to implement autonomy, it will inspire other ethnic and sectarian groups to gain similar status which will complicate even more the Syrian conflict.

Chapter 2

The rise of Islamic State

Its rising surprised everyone. The emergence of a "Caliphate" in 2014, which prompted extreme Islamist tendencies and perceptions, through the flames of war in Syria and Iraq, provoked strong international concern, as it is an organization / faction that is not "hidden": it has set under his control large areas in Iraq and Syria, fights off its opponents, has an army of tens of thousands of fighters trained in the use of modern warfare and, alongside its war operations, conducts extensive propaganda operations with the use of new means to intimidate its enemies and attract new militants from all over the world.

The Islamic State was a branch of ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria) - an Islamic / jihadist organization founded a decade ago as an al-Qaida branch in Iraq⁴². ISIS "grew up" fighting against US forces in the Sunni regions of western Iraq and spread to eastern and northern Syria during the Syrian civil war. The establishment of the Islamic State / Caliphate, under the leadership of Abu Bakr al Bagdadi, has been the culmination of its activity - the great achievement of ISIS, which has evolved into one of its most "dark" protagonists of the past years.

ISIS began as a branch of Al-Qaeda, founded in Iraq in 2004 after the American invasion and headed by Ayman al-Zawahiri. It filled the security and governmental void created by the disintegration of the Iraqi army and Saddam Hussein's regime, accompanied by the increasing alienation of the Sunni

⁴² <https://israelbehindthenews.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/isis.pdf>

Muslims from the central, Shi'ite-affiliated government in Baghdad sponsored by the United States. The branch of Al-Qaeda gradually established itself in Iraq during the fighting against the United States and its allies, adopted the name the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), and became a central force among the anti-American insurgents.

Towards the end of the American presence in Iraq the ISI was weakened (as were other insurgents), the result of America's military successes combined with its wise policy of fostering the Sunni tribes in western Iraq (ISIS' principal domain). However, the Americans did not continue the policy, and later policies carried out by Shi'ite Adnan al-Maliki and the American withdrawal from Iraq all contributed to strengthening the ISI. That gave it a convenient starting point for its operations when the Americans eventually withdrew from Iraq.

The civil war that broke out in March 2011 made Syria fertile ground for the spread of the ISI to Syria. In January 2012 the Al-Nusra Front ("support front") was founded as the Syrian branch of the ISI. However, these two disagreed early on and the Al-Nusra Front split off from the Islamic State in Iraq, which then changed its name to the Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS). Al-Qaeda, under the leadership of Ayman al-Zawahiri, announced its support for the Al-Nusra Front and its dissociation from the ISI. After the split ISIS gained military successes, leading it to declare the Islamic State (or the "Caliphate State"), while the rival Al-Nusra Front has weakened⁴³.

Ideology – General Characteristics⁴⁴

ISIS is an Islamic Salafist / Jihadist organization. Salafism is an extremist political / religious movement within Islam, which seeks to restore the "golden age" of the dawn of Islam, that is to say, the time of Prophet Muhammad and the first Caliphs. Based on the Salafist jihadist ideology, this will be through the jihad: the holy war against internal and external enemies. As emphasized in the analysis, jihad, according to salabatic jihadism, is a personal duty of each Muslim.

⁴³ <https://israelbehindthenews.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/isis.pdf>

⁴⁴ https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus148_CT7.pdf

According to the central idea of ISIS, this golden age will come back through the establishment of a supranational Islamic Caliphate, in accordance with the standards of the first Caliph's regimes after the death of Muhammad. They will be governed by Islamic religious law (Sharia) in its most extreme interpretation.

Caliphate will stand on the ruins of the nation-states founded in the Middle East after the First World War. Some of them, including Syria and Iraq, where ISIS is attempting, are in the process of disintegration due to the turmoil in the Middle East, creating favorable conditions for Caliphate's vision.

The Islamic State area, whose founding was proclaimed by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, extends to eastern Syria and western Iraq. ISIS seeks to expand into Syria and Iraq and finally to control these countries. Then there will be the countries of "wider Syria": Jordan, Lebanon, Israel and the Palestinian Authority - and then other countries in the Middle East and beyond. According to the vision of ISIS, the future Islamic Caliphate will include large areas of North Africa, Asia and the Caucasus as well as parts of Europe once under Muslim sovereignty such as Spain and the Balkans.

The main features of ISIS, are as follows:

Military capabilities: ISIS is estimated to have approximately 25,000 fighters in Syria and Iraq, and this number is rising. Based on calculations, about 12,000 come from these two countries, and over 13,000 are foreign fighters coming from the Arab / Muslim world. It is estimated that 3,000 come from Western countries (almost half from France and Britain), and usually arrive in Syria via Turkey, receive brief training and begin to fight. Most people return to their countries of origin. During their stay in Syria, they receive military training and receive a Salafistic / Jihadist catechism, thus evolving into security threats for their countries and to a certain extent for Israel (as a result of the attack on the French Jewish Museum in Brussels a citizen who had fought in ISIS).

Weaponry: ISIS has a large arsenal, most of which has come from the Syrian and Iraqi army. This includes light weapons, various rockets and

munitions, as well as anti-tank and anti-aircraft rockets. Additionally, ISIS has heavy armament and advanced technologies commonly found in regular national armies: artillery, tanks, armored vehicles, portable anti-aircraft missiles and unmanned aircraft. ISIS has used mustard gas sometime in Syria and Iraq and possibly have other types of chemical weapons. It is also believed to have at least one Scud missile and some aircraft (operating from an ISIS-controlled airport).

Areas under its control: At the time of its uprising, ISIS controlled the estimated one-third of Iraq and between one-quarter and one-third of Syria. In this area, about five to six million people are believed to live. However, one of the weak points of the Islamic State is believed that relatively few fighters control a large area - and for this reason ISIS is based on local supporters and allies, making efforts to recruit Syrian, Iraqi and foreign.

Establishment of alternative governance networks: in the areas under its control, ISIS instituted alternative systems to replace those that had collapsed (Syria, Iraq). These include education networks, justice networks, policing and law enforcement. ISIS uses them to provide vital services and at the same time to impose its salafistic / jihadist ideology on the local population. This is why it takes brutal measures against his opponents and the minorities under his control (including mass executions). However, so far, local populations seem to have been compromised with ISIS control, and sometimes they can even support it. They do so in particular, taking into account its ability to provide basic services, restore daily life to the status quo ante and cover the governance gap that has been created.

High economic potential: In Syria and Iraq, ISIS has controlled state infrastructure, including most oil fields in eastern Syria and many oil fields in Iraq. Exporting petroleum products is the main source of revenue for ISIS and its profits are estimated at several million dollars a day. Other sources of income include various kinds of criminal activity (extortion, ransom ransom, antiquities trade), donations, and local taxation. So it is a prime example of a terrorist organization that has managed to obtain semi-national financial capabilities to

fund its military infrastructure and to be able to set up an alternative system of government.

The "schism" with al-Qaida

One of the most noteworthy elements identified in the ISIS / Islamic State analysis is the controversy with al-Qaida, which is highlighted in a series of letters on both sides, with Ayman al-Zawahiri denouncing ISIS followed by an ISIS announcement to "attack" al-Qaida⁴⁵.

It can be considered that after the schism ISIS was strengthened in Iraq and Syria, overshadowing the Al-Nushra Front. This is due to the attractiveness of its ideology (which has grown since the declaration of the Islamic State / Caliphate), its brutality (which frightens its enemies), its achievements in the battlefield and its many resources.

The strengthening of ISIS over the past year is expressed in many ways: commanders and whole units of the Al-Nushra Front and other guerrilla organizations have entered it, parts of the Sunni opposition in Iraq are working together, foreign fighters, including those from Western countries, to enter the ISIS classes instead of those of the Al Nushra Front. Loyalty oaths are given to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi by jihadist organizations across the borders of Iraq and Syria.

The flags of al-Qaida and other Islamic organizations, including the ISIS flag, are black with a black inscription of the Shahada, which is the heart of Islamic faith: "There is no God from Allah ". Below the inscription there is a white circle, the seal of Muhammad and an inscription: "Muhammad, the messenger of Allah". In some cases, the flag (before the foundation of Caliphate) also included the inscription "Islamic State in Iraq and Al-Sam" to stand out from other jihadist flags.

The flag used by ISIS is known by several names, such as "The Flag of Uniqueness", "The Flag of Caliphate," and sometimes "The Flag of Muhammad". In practice, the flags of the Salafistic jihadist organizations differ

⁴⁵ <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/isis-vs-al-qaeda-jihadisms-global-civil-war/>

from the Prophet's. Based on tradition, the prophet's flag is called "the banner of the air" and is different.

ISIS has transformed its jihadist flag into a "brand", which has been "successfully" promoted around the world, including the West. Knowing the importance of fighting for hearts and minds, ISIS has made extensive use of its flag by its military forces and by the governing institutions it has established Arab and Western media, with ISIS's constant news coverage, have extensively used the propaganda "raw materials" provided by ISIS, contributing to the "branding" of the flag. The use of flag and badges quickly evolved into a means of expressing contempt (to the enemy) and / or supporting ISIS in the Arab and Muslim world in the West and Israel.

The allies of ISIS⁴⁶

ISIS is not the only organization that fights against the regimes in Iraq and Syria. However, the political situation is different in both countries.

In Iraq, ISIS is backed by a coalition of Sunni Muslim organizations that increase the number of supporters in the Sunni population. ISIS is the dominant military force within the coalition, and is the spearhead of the campaign that began in the summer of 2014.

In Syria, ISIS is a major guerrilla organization, one of many opposing the Assad regime. They usually do not work with other organizations, unless this is done under their terms, and therefore the relationships are tense. Some of them consider ISIS as potentially dangerous to themselves and as harmful to the overall campaign against the Syrian regime, believing that at some point they will face it. However, rivalry (especially between ISIS and the Al-Nushra Front) was temporarily "on ice" when President Obama announced the launch of operations against the Islamic State.

In Iraq, the Sunni Muslim population that supports ISIS includes organizations with ideologies and purposes different from the Islamic State, but a common denominator is hostility to the Baghdad regime. These organizations

⁴⁶ https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus148_CT7.pdf

include Sunni tribes' members in northern and western Iraq, Ba'ath activists and Iraqi army officers who had previously backed Saddam Hussein, as well as non-ISIS (such as Ansar al-Islam) non-ISIS organizations and members of the Islamist Sufi organization known as the Naksabadi Order. However, it is stressed in the analysis that there are Sunni races that cooperate with the Iraqi army and oppose ISIS - which are treated with extreme brutality. A typical example is the Albu Nimr tribe: at least 400 of its members were killed by ISIS, commanded by the governor of the Al-Abbar province.

The rise and fall of ISIS⁴⁷

For an organization with such spectacular aspirations, the fall of the Islamic State took place in a rather trivial environment: in a hospital and a sports stadium in Raqqa, the de facto capital of Caliphate in Syria. After weeks of violent clashes on the streets and bombings, these last strongholds fell on Kurdish fighters for more than three years after the Islamic State became world-famous by a campaign to win unprecedented barbarity.

Although analysts warn that the fall of Raqqa does not mean the end of ISIS, the scale of its decline is impressive. By mid-2014, the organization of the jihadists had controlled a population of seven or eight million people in oil-rich soils, refineries, enormous grain reserves, profitable smuggling routes, and huge supplies of weapons and ammunition. Its economic capital was Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq. There was no doubt: ISIS was the most powerful, the richest and best equipped jihad ever seen by the world.

Its success was a shock to the entire Islamic world and to the West. What an al-Qaeda dreamed of, the organization founded by Osama bin Laden in Pakistan in 1988, for decades or centuries in the future, was succeeded by the Islamic State within a few months. Its victorious campaign and the establishment of an Islamic caliphate (announced by the monster of a 950-year-old mosque in Mosul in a speech by his 46-year-old Abu Bakr al-Bagnadi) was the most spectacular achievement of Islamists.

⁴⁷ <https://israelbehindthenews.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/isis.pdf>

Young men, and some women, all over the world found the appeal of ISIS irresistible. They traveled to the Middle East from Belgium and the Maldives, some returned to their homelands to convert or, in Europe, to carry out some of the most notorious terrorist attacks ever made. ISIS inspired others, who did not fight in the battlefields, to make their own terrorist attacks. From Bangladesh to Florida, hundreds of people have been killed in a new wave of terrorist acts.

This huge and ambitious project has been crushed in the ruins of Raqqa. More than 60,000 ISIS fighters have been killed since 2014, according to senior US military personnel. Leadership has shrunk, though Al Bagdadi survives. The administration has been destroyed, so are the training camps. And the flow of propaganda, so important for recruiting and provoking attacks, has stopped.

The defeat of ISIS was not easy, although three inherent weaknesses of the organization made it inevitable in the long run. First, the Islamic State needed constant conquests to succeed: in the eyes of the supporters the spread of the caliphate was a clear sign that the organization was performing the will of God. Expansion also meant recruiting new members, obtaining weapons and ammunition, archaeological treasures for sale, new looting assets, food for distribution, and new resources such as oil wells and refineries.

But further expansion from the Sunni territories in Syria and Iraq was impossible. The borders of stronger states such as Turkey, Israel and Jordan proved to be very resilient. There was no way for a Sunni Arab Muslim power to penetrate deep into Central and South Iraq dominated by Shiites.

Secondly, intolerance and violence from ISIS to the communities under its authority undermined support for the local population. One reason for the rapid expansion of the organization was that Sunni local leaders in Iraq and Syria saw significant advantages in accepting the power of ISIS. Its sovereignty brought about relative security, a form of justice, and defense against the Shia and oppression of the regime. But in 2015, with a weak ISIS, incapable of offering anything but barbaric violence, mass deserts began.

Thirdly, the Islamic State has placed them against the West. This was a conscious decision, firmly embedded in the movement, and it was not taken by self-defense, as some have thought. The organization's first jihadists were sent for terrorist attacks in Europe in early 2014, before the US coalition began bombing. The combination of Western fire power and funding to local forces has consistently proven strong in Pakistan, Nigeria, Somalia, Libya, Mali and elsewhere. The absolute victory against the jihadists is difficult to achieve, but the organizations targeting the West are usually forced to abandon their territorial gains, especially urban centers.

But it is equally clear that any victory over ISIS is partial. The recent military attack was not accompanied by a parallel political effort. There is still deep dissatisfaction and fear among the Sunni Iraqi, and Syria's civil war does not say it is over. The work of building an Islamic state has been defeated, but the organization is not. It can still do a great deal of damage to Iraq, Syria and the West through linked groups, the fighters they send to make terrorist attacks, and those that inspire.

The threat of all this will change, but it will not be eliminated now that the caliphate no longer exists. Some believe that ISIS will continue to exist as a "virtual caliphate," backed by online propaganda, to recruit aspiring jihadists in London, Birmingham, Paris, Antwerp, or Berlin as before. Many proselytes from the United Kingdom, Belgium or France were young men with a migrant background and criminal record for insignificant and sometimes serious crimes, and superficial knowledge of the Islamic faith, in the name of which they claimed to have killed. ISIS offered them everything that a street gang gives to its members - adventure, prestige, economic, even sexual opportunities - plus the promise of redemption from the sins of the past and the solution of a complex identity crisis.

Chapter 3

United Nations (UN) response

The Syrian conflict started in March 2011, and has generated the world's largest humanitarian crisis in recent years. The situation in the country and the conditions for refugees in neighboring countries continues to deteriorate. Almost 13.1 million Syrians now need assistance, and 6.1 million of them are displaced inside their own country and half of the IDPs are children struggling to survive and cope with the crisis. In addition, more than 5.5 million have fled to neighboring countries, a third of them school-aged children and youth between 5 and 17 years old. An estimated 8.1 million Syrian children and youth inside Syria and in neighboring countries are in need of education. In addition, the country's cultural heritage is continuously exposed to threats of destruction, looting and illicit traffic. Important sites and monuments have been destroyed or substantially damaged.⁴⁸

As we can see reading all the above-mentioned statistics Syria is a place where United Nations (UN) needed to act to protect human lives. There are many debates if UN's actions helped the situation and if actually served its purpose. Before touching this issue first we are obliged to look at the facts and the actions that were taken.

The Security Council and World Peace

The Security Council is the organ of the United Nations (UN) whose function is the maintenance of international peace and security. The structure that gives rise to it is expressed in Chapter V of the Charter of the United Nations and its activities are conducted by Chapters VI, VII and VIII.⁴⁹ It is the duty of the Council, therefore, to identify the existence of threats to peace or acts of aggression and immediately convene the parties for dialogue using peaceful means, and therefore, recommend methods and terms for a resolution for the situation.

⁴⁸ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/syria-crisis-response/regional-response/syria-crisis-intro/>

⁴⁹ <https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/>

The composition of the Security Council consists of five permanent members: China, France, Russian Federation, United Kingdom and United States; together with ten non-permanent members elected every two years by the General Assembly, and the rotation is aimed at broadly encompassing representations with geographical diversity. States that are members of the United Nations but not of the Security Council may attend meetings within the Council in situations where the topic under discussion directly affects their interests, however, this participation is devoid of the possibility of voting, so that the countries have observer.

The UN Charter institutionalizes the functions and powers of the Security Council. Thus, through this instrument, it is assigned to the organ the monopoly on the authorization of military and non-military coercion, safeguarding the individual or collective right to self-defense. Measures taken under Chapter VII are the only manifestations that demonstrate the use of authority by the Security Council, since they can be pursued without the consent of other actors in the international system. Faced with the current paradigms of global governance, the Security Council should play the role of an actor with active participation in security issues on the global agenda through what, in theory, should be the joint action of its member countries. The Security Council would, therefore, carry out the interference - including on occasions when it is necessary to use force - in a multilateral way in places where threats to international peace have taken hold. Thus, it allows the states to enable direct intervention in other states, in accordance with the principles and procedures described in the Charter of the United Nations, in situations that may represent a crisis to global stability. In this way, the Security Council is implementing the objectives of member states to address critical situations.

The need to deal with the harmful effects on the international community and the failure to respect the human rights caused by the Syrian crisis gives the Security Council the prerogative to act in an effective way on behalf of its member States. However, the action by the Security Council to address the Syrian conflict cannot be considered fully successful because of the obstacles placed by the countries in center of the discussions, notably the permanent

members, as a result of the difficulties of coordinating a joint action in agreement⁵⁰.

With a bloody civil war raging in the country for more than seven years and a growing death toll, there are many who wonder why has there not been a humanitarian intervention in Syria under the umbrella of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine. To begin with, it is fundamental that we first understand the key principle at hand, the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect, which was an initiative of the United Nations established on the 2009 World Summit.

The International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) issued a report⁵¹ in 2001 entitled Responsibility to Protect (R2P), whose main objective is to establish guidelines for ending mass atrocities observed in a number of vulnerable locations. Thus, countries should act according to three pillars that guide their responsibility regarding the intervention in these localities: to prevent, to react and to build. The first pillar describes that nations must obey the prerogative of protecting their citizens from crimes of mass atrocities, reinforcing the principle of sovereignty in the international system. The second pillar refers to the international community, establishing the commitment of other countries to provide assistance to nations in building capacities to prevent mass atrocities, and prevention being the central element of a successful strategy for R2P. The third pillar finally states that in cases where the state is insufficiently able to provide protection to its population, the international community has a responsibility to act, so that the situation of instability which poses a concrete threat to the well-being of this population is resolved by legitimate means⁵².

The scope of R2P was defined in 2005 from a United Nations summit, so that “each State has a responsibility to protect its populations through necessary and appropriate means, and the international community, through the United Nations, also has the responsibility to use diplomatic, humanitarian

⁵⁰ Medzihorsky, Juraj, Milos Popovic and Erin K. Jenne. 2017. “Rhetoric of Civil Conflict Management: United Nations Security Council Debates Over the Syrian Civil War.” *Research and Politics*, 1-10.

⁵¹ <http://responsibilitytoprotect.org/ICISS%20Report.pdf>

⁵² Stark, Alex. 2011. “Introduction” In *The Responsibility to Protect: challenges and opportunities in light of the Libyan intervention*.

and peaceful means, in accordance with Chapters VI and VIII of the Charter, to help protect populations”⁵³, which include the use of force by military interventions in unstable locations.

After having analyzed the R2P principle, we then have to consider whether this doctrine is applicable to the Syrian situation, where since March 2011 there has been a violent uprising against the ruling government, which has escalated into a full-blown civil war, claiming the lives of thousands Syrian citizens. International organizations and countries have staunchly condemned the regime of President Bashar al-Assad for carrying out what has been described as a “war of extermination” and genocide against his own people and subjects⁵⁴. Thus, according to a 2012 report from Amnesty International, Syrian government forces and militia have been “rampaging through towns and villages” setting houses on fire and indiscriminately killing people of all ages⁵⁵.

As the civil war has intensified so has the brutality of the regime, with government forces destroying everything from homes to medical facilities; torturing prisoners, often to death; denying the injured from life-saving medical treatment; and finally shooting and killing anyone suspected of aiding the opposition, including many innocent people. In their scathing report, Amnesty International concluded that the “deliberate and unlawful killings are part of a widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population, carried out in an organized manner and as part of state policy” and therefore clearly constitute crimes against humanity. The UN itself agrees with this report as, according to its own investigations, it has found that the regime has committed a growing number of “gross violations of human rights”, coupled with war crimes and crimes against humanity⁵⁶. However, there is no considered action to address the crisis, so that the international community, especially the Security Council, fails to exercise its responsibility to protect the Syrian population and to seek directives to neutralize the current threat to peace and international instability.

⁵³ Stark, Alex. 2011. “Introduction” In *The Responsibility to Protect: challenges and opportunities in light of the Libyan intervention*

⁵⁴ <https://edition.cnn.com/2012/10/30/world/meast/syria-civil-war/index.html>

⁵⁵ https://www.es.amnesty.org/uploads/media/Deadly_Reprisals_-_Syria_report.pdf

⁵⁶ https://www.es.amnesty.org/uploads/media/Shooting_the_messenger_Final_RS_3.pdf

The actions taken by Security Council can be seen in the following table:⁵⁷

Security Council Resolutions	Description
14 APRIL 2012 S/RES/2042	This resolution authorized the deployment of 30 military observers to Syria.
21 APRIL 2012 S/RES/2043	This resolution established UNSMIS.
20 JULY 2012 S/RES/2059	This resolution extended UNSMIS for a final period of 30 days.
27 SEPTEMBER 2013 S/RES/2118	This resolution was adopted unanimously by the Council and required the verification and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles, called for the convening of the Geneva II peace talks and endorsed the establishment of a transitional governing body in Syria with full executive powers.
22 FEBRUARY 2014 S/RES/2139	This resolution demanded that all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, allow humanitarian access in Syria across conflict lines, in besieged areas and across borders and expressed the intent to take further steps in the case of non-compliance.
14 JULY 2014 S/RES/2165	This resolution authorized cross-border and cross-line access for the UN and its partners to deliver humanitarian aid in Syria without state consent and established a monitoring mechanism for 180 days.
15 AUGUST 2014 S/RES/2170	Condemned the recruitment by ISIS and al-Nusra of foreign fighters and listed six individuals affiliated with those groups under the 1267/1989 Al-Qaida sanctions regime.
24 SEPTEMBER 2014 S/RES/2178	This resolution expanded the counter-terrorism framework by imposing obligations on member states to respond to the threat of foreign terrorist fighters.
17 DECEMBER 2014 S/RES/2191	Renewed authorization for cross-border humanitarian access until 10 January 2016.
12 FEBRUARY 2015 S/RES/2199	Was on ISIS and Al-Nusra's illicit funding via oil exports, traffic of cultural heritage, ransom payments and external donations.
6 MARCH 2015 S/RES/2209	This resolution condemned the use of toxic chemicals such as chlorine, without attributing blame; stressed that those responsible should be held accountable; recalled resolution 2118; and supported the 4 February 2015 decision of the OPCW.
7 AUGUST 2015 S/RES/2235	This was a resolution that requested the UN Secretary-General and OPCW Director-General to recommend the establishment

⁵⁷ https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un_documents_type/security-council-resolutions/page/1?ctype=Syria&cbtype=syria#038;cbtype=syria

	and operation of a UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism to determine responsibility for the use of chemical weapons in Syria
20 NOVEMBER 2015 S/RES/2249	Called for member states to take all necessary measures on the territory under the control of ISIS to prevent terrorist acts committed by ISIS and other Al-Qaida affiliates.
18 DECEMBER 2015 S/RES/2254	This was the first resolution focused exclusively on a political solution to the Syrian crisis. It was adopted unanimously.
22 DECEMBER 2015 S/RES/2258	Renewed the authorization for cross-border aid delivery until January 2017 and included language calling on member states to prevent and suppress the flow of foreign terrorist fighters in and out of Syria.
26 FEBRUARY 2016 S/RES/2268	This was a resolution that endorsed the cessation of hostilities and called for the resumption of political talks.
31 OCTOBER 2016 S/RES/2314	Extended the mandate of the UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism to 18 November 2016.
17 NOVEMBER 2016 S/RES/2319	Renewed the mandate of the UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism for a further year.
19 DECEMBER 2016 S/RES/2328	This resolution demanded UN access to monitor evacuations from Aleppo.
21 DECEMBER 2016 S/RES/2332	This resolution renewed the authorization for cross-border aid delivery until 10 January 2018.
31 DECEMBER 2016 S/RES/2336	Welcomed efforts by Russia and Turkey to end violence in Syria and jumpstart a political process.
19 DECEMBER 2017 S/RES/2393	This resolution renewed the authorization for cross-border and cross-line aid delivery.
24 FEBRUARY 2018 S/RES/2401	This was a resolution, adopted unanimously, demanding a cessation of hostilities in Syria.
13 DECEMBER 2018 S/RES/2449	This was a resolution prepared by Sweden and Kuwait renewing the authorization for cross-border and cross-line humanitarian access to Syria.

But despite all these resolutions that were voted by the Security Council there were 12 times that resolutions were vetoed⁵⁸. All the times Russia and China were the members that prevented this resolution. Here's a look at Russia's and China's vetoes on Syria:

⁵⁸ https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/page/6?s=veto+syria&post_type%5B0%5D

April 2018: Russia vetoed a US-drafted resolution after 12 countries backed the measure. China abstained, while Bolivia voted against.

October/November 2017: In less than a month, Russia used its veto three times to block draft resolutions on renewing a UN-led probe of chemical weapons attacks in Syria.

The Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) died on 17 November after several attempts by the Security Council to save the panel failed to meet Russian demands.

April 2017: Russia vetoed a draft resolution. Russian deputy envoy to the Security Council, Vladimir Safronkov said that the primary problem was the fact that the draft resolution by the troika designated the guilty party prior to an independent and objective investigation.

February 2017: Russia and China again vetoed a UN resolution, drafted by Britain, France and the United States that would have imposed sanctions on Syria over chemical weapons use in the conflict.

December 2016: A resolution that calls for a truce in Aleppo is vetoed by both China and Russia. Egypt, New Zealand and Spain presented the measure. The vote was 11 to 3 with one abstention from Angola. Venezuela voted against, alongside China and Russia.

October 2016: Russia alone vetoes a text proposed by France and Spain to halt the bombing of Aleppo, after presenting a rival draft that urged a ceasefire but made no mention of barring military flights over the city. China abstained in that vote, the first time it did not veto a Syria draft resolution alongside Russia.

May 2014: China and Russia block a French-drafted proposal for the Security Council to refer Syrian crimes to the International Criminal Court (ICC) is blocked. All 13 other council members backed the measure. Russia accused Britain, France and the United States of hypocrisy in not wanting war crimes in Iraq referred to the ICC.

July 2012: China and Russia again veto a Western-backed resolution that threatens Syria with sanctions if it does not stop using heavy weapons.

February 2012: Russia and China again vetoed a draft resolution that condemns a Syrian government crackdown on the opposition, while the Security Council's other members voted in favor. The veto sparked an international outcry, especially because it came a few hours after Syrian forces bomb the protest city of Homs, killing hundreds of people.

October 2011: Six months after the Syrian conflict began, Russia and China blocked a proposed UN resolution condemning grave human rights violations in Syria and threatening measures against President Bashar al-Assad's government.

The objection to the modus operandi designated through R2P is expressed by some of the permanent members of the Security Council, notably China and Russia. On the other hand, it is alleged that the other members of the Security Council, the United States, France and the United Kingdom, intend to use the R2P protocol to instrumentalize their intention to promote interventions motivated by their biased national interests, among which the deposition of Assad's power stands out as the most latent aspiration of these actors. It turns out that the result of this intervention is, according to the allegations, a higher number of unsuccessful military investitures on political and non-humanitarian grounds and, consequently, more instability and damage to the population⁵⁹.

The situation in Syria has been going on for years since the conflict erupted, and until now the Security Council has been unable to find ways to reverse hostilities in the region. The lack of internal agreement within the body, in this way, is the main impediment to a more effective coordination to deal with civil war. The permanent members of the Security Council do not fit into a consensus-driven axis because of a complex scenario of intricate incompatibilities of interests in the region and its unfolding, reflecting the old

⁵⁹ Medzihorsky, Juraj, Milos Popovic and Erin K. Jenne. 2017. "Rhetoric of Civil Conflict Management: United Nations Security Council Debates Over the Syrian Civil War." *Research and Politics*, 1-10

polarization of the international system and being passed on to the dynamics the United States, the United Kingdom and France, and in contrast, Russia and China. Thus, the situation established by the Assad regime shows that the conjuncture in which the UN operates has an intrinsic fragility, in which “international justice and accountability are secondary to the main interests of its member countries”⁶⁰.

The largest front of disagreement between the deliberations of the Security Council is, therefore, constituted by the clash between the United States and Russia, the other permanent members being influenced by their respective allies in the international scene regarding the votes and procedures amidst the security discussions. The dichotomy represented by the aforementioned nations dates from the very beginning of the creation of the Security Council and has been ever since a factor motivating impasses amid the internal dynamics of the body, hindering negotiations in the multilateral sphere and leaving the Syrian situation without urgent remedies.

Russia’s positioning, as it takes part in the Syrian conflict, is motivated by its orientation towards Russian foreign policy from the rise of Vladimir Putin to the nation’s presidency in the early 2000s. Since then, Russia has articulated key sectors of the economy, such as hydrocarbons and war, and in parallel with the intensification of economic development, Putin’s government seeks to become evident in the international community. The purpose of this conduct is to reinforce its position as one of the great global players in the securitization of the global agenda in the current context ⁶¹.

Following the guidelines set forth in the protocol determined by the United Nations, the United States centralized efforts to depose Assad’s dictatorial government not directly through the use of force, but rather by addressing the issue as a humanitarian crisis that should be solved urgently. Moreover, the possibility of direct military intervention on Russian territory would not be feasible given the failed experience of NATO’s incursion into

⁶⁰ DePetris, Daniel. 2016. “Syria Shows That Realism Still Dominate Global Politics.” The World Post. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/daniel-rdepetris/syria-shows-that-realism-_b_12474334.html.

⁶¹ Pautasso, Diego, and Douglas de Quadros Rocha. 2017. "The Conflict in Syria and the Return of Russia to the Middle East." *Bulletin Conjuntura NERINT* 2, 5.

Afghanistan decades ago; together with the costs of financing such an investment in a context of global economic crisis⁶².

The internal dynamics of the Security Council are being modified as the domestic regimes of its component nations, especially the permanent members, change. Nowadays, it is possible to affirm that the stagnation of taking action within the organ in relation to the Syrian crisis is due to the constant clash between countries among the P5, in which Russia and China guide their behavior by more assertive and unfavorable positions on direct interventions that may modify the maintenance of the current order that is favorable to them. On the other hand, the United States and the other permanent countries seek operational means to legitimize interventions based on biased interests to their own external agendas. The Security Council thus faces skepticism on part of the international community about its ability to respond to the growing challenge to global security posed by the Syrian crisis, particularly in view of the evident involvement of a multiplicity of non-state actors by means of organized crime, the articulation of militia groups and terrorist organizations⁶³.

Interventions in sovereign states in situation of security instability carried out by the Security Council present high costs, not only in financial terms, but also considering political aspects in the international community, especially regarding the legitimacy of such operations⁶⁴. Thus, the political cost of executing a forceful intervention in a sovereign territory, because it is extremely high, must be approved by international community. The intervention, therefore, to be useful in its political character and to be taken as satisfactory must be in accordance with the objectives set by the states and other parties involved, besides being carried out by means that these actors consider legitimate⁶⁵.

⁶² Arraes, Virgílio C. 2014. "United States and Syria: from the end of the Cold War to contemporaneity." *Meridian Bulletin* 47, 15, 145, 34-43.

⁶³ Einsiedel, Sebastian von, David M. Malone and Bruno S. Ugarte. 2015. *The UN Security Council in an Age of Great Power Rivalry*. United Nations University Working Paper Series, 4

⁶⁴ <https://seer.ufrgs.br/austral/article/viewFile/76055/47676>

⁶⁵ Finnemore, Martha. 2003. "The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs About the Use of Force." *Cornell Studies in Security Affairs*. Ithaca e Londres: Cornell University Press

The fact that the parties most directly involved in the issue of the Syrian conflict within the Security Council - that is, its member countries - disagree about the implementation of an intervention implies that any attempt to operate on Syrian territory is not made with legitimate instruments, but also loses its political consent before the international community. In this way, the Security Council is prevented from acting to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Syria. The criteria for the positioning of the great security powers vary according to the powers of the economic, geopolitical, strategic and military order, so that they date back decades, since the international system presented a different conformation from that of the present day. Thus the past conjectures have been perpetuated and adapted to the present arrangements, so that there is still a dichotomy between the United States and Russia through the propagation of its interests in the Syrian conflict and other sensitive aspects concerning the situation in the Middle East region⁶⁶.

Moreover, the individual positions of the nations in question interfere not only with the strategic conduct of the conflict on and around Syrian territory, but rather with the discussions in the Security Council. As a consequence, the deliberative activities of the organ become more stagnant and less efficient, due to the political clash between the players that have veto power and, with considerable frequency, seize the decisions of each other, if it is an affront - direct or indirect - to their aspirations in the region in dispute.

Peace talks

The Syrian peace process has taken many forms since the conflict began in 2011, with separate initiatives brokered by the Arab League, the United Nations, the "Friends of Syria", Iran, and Russia. Now in its eighth year, the war has resulted in the death of more than 330,000 people and millions more have been displaced. Efforts to mediate the conflict are now centered on UN-backed talks in Geneva, Switzerland, while seven separate rounds of

⁶⁶ Arraes, Virgilio C. 2014. "United States and Syria: from the end of the Cold War to contemporaneity." *Meridian Bulletin* 47, 15, 145, 34-43

negotiations brokered by Russia, Turkey and Iran have been held since the beginning of 2017 in Astana, Kazakhstan.

UN lead the Geneva peace talks between Syrian government, Syrian opposition, UN Security Council members and EU with the main goal to be a political settlement in Syria. Until now there have been conducted 4 rounds of peace talks without much success. In the contrary the Russian-led Astana peace talks seems to gain more ground and achieve more effects in the situation.

In December 2015 the UNSC adopts resolution 2254⁶⁷. This document becomes the basis for negotiations and serves as a framework for political transition. 2254 outlines the UN's support for a Syrian-led political process that "establishes credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance and sets a schedule and process for drafting a new constitution" within six months. The resolution also recommends "free and fair elections, pursuant to the new constitution, to be held within 18 months" under UN supervision

Geneva I, June 2012

An "action group" conference (now referred to as Geneva I Conference on Syria) was held on Saturday 30 June 2012, in Geneva, initiated by the then UN peace envoy to Syria Kofi Annan and attended by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, a representative of China, British Foreign Secretary Hague, and Kofi Annan. Mr Annan, issuing a communiqué⁶⁸, said that the conference agreed on the need for a "transitional government body with full executive powers" which could include members of the present Syrian government and of the opposition. William Hague said that all five permanent members of the UN Security Council – the US, Russia, China, France and the UK – supported Mr Annan's efforts. Clinton however suggested that Syrian dictator Assad could, in such transitional government, not remain in power, which immediately was contradicted by Lavrov. The Geneva talks were condemned by Ahrar al-Sham leader, Hassan Abboud.

⁶⁷ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12171.doc.htm>

⁶⁸ <https://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Syria/FinalCommuniqueActionGroupforSyria.pdf>

Geneva II, 2014

The Geneva II Middle East peace conference was a United Nations (UN) backed international (peace) conference, aimed at bringing Syrian government and opposition together to discuss a transitional government. Lakhdar Brahimi, UN special envoy to Syria, tried to pursue the conference in close cooperation with the U.S. and Russia. It started on 22 January 2014 and ended on 31 January; no agreement was reached.

Geneva III, January 2016

On Friday, 29 January 2016, a UN Peace Conference for Syria started in Geneva in Switzerland. At the first day, Syrian government and opposition refused to sit in the same room together. On 3 February 2016, UN envoy Staffan de Mistura suspended the peace talks. Russian foreign minister Lavrov commented that "the [Syrian] opposition took a completely unconstructive position and tried to put forward preconditions". Rebel commanders were cited as saying they hoped the peace talks' collapse would "convince their foreign backers, states including Turkey and Saudi Arabia, that it was time to send them more powerful and advanced weapons, including anti-aircraft missiles".

Geneva IV, February–March 2017

The Geneva IV peace talks on Syria were talks between the Syrian government and the Syrian opposition under the auspices of the United Nations. The opposition was represented by the High Negotiations Committee, while the government delegation was led by Syria's UN ambassador, Bashar Jaafari. The talks began on 23 February 2017 and concluded on 3 March. The government delegation sought to focus on counter-terrorism while the opposition sought to focus on political transition. Also, they introduced Geneva V, VI, VII and VIII peace talk for the future.

Efforts of UN's bodies

UNESCO⁶⁹

Membership of UNESCO is governed by Articles II and XV of the Constitution and by rules 98 to 101 of the Rules of Procedure of the General Conference⁷⁰. Membership of the United Nations carries with it the right to membership of UNESCO. States that are not members of United Nations may be admitted to UNESCO, upon recommendation of the Executive Board, by a two-thirds majority vote of the General Conference.

Most Member States have established Permanent Delegations to UNESCO which, headed by Ambassadors, undertake liaison between the Organization and their governments.

All Member States have established a National Commission for UNESCO⁷¹. The UNESCO National Commissions are national cooperating bodies set up by the Member States for the purpose of associating their governmental and non-governmental bodies with the work of the Organization. Syria has been a member of UNESCO since 16/11/1946.

UNESCO has been active in responding to this crisis, particularly by assisting Syrian refugees and host communities in Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon, and safeguarding Syria's cultural heritage. UNESCO's response addresses humanitarian needs and longer-term development assistance, creating complementarity and synergy among these areas. The response is integrated into nationally-led response processes and is fully aligned with the Humanitarian Response Plan 2017 (HRP) and the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2018-2019 (3RP).

In the field of education, UNESCO's response is focusing on youth education and empowerment, providing educational opportunities and enhancing quality of teaching and learning both in formal and non-formal settings for young people affected by the crisis in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq.

⁶⁹ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/syria-crisis-response/regional-response/syria-crisis-intro/>

⁷⁰ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/search/5b8803a9-5270-4251-82e4-32aa7640b424>

⁷¹ <https://en.unesco.org/countries/national-commissions>

Priority areas for UNESCO action inside Syria are teacher training in technical and vocational education, accelerated learning programs, extra-curricular activities, and psycho-social support. Education and particularly post primary education remains the gap area when it comes to humanitarian response to the Syria crisis. Capitalizing on the achievements made so far and further consolidating its efforts, UNESCO has scaled up its response by addressing learning gaps of youth in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq. In February 2015 UNESCO launched “Bridging Learning Gaps for youth”, a program that will enable access to secondary and higher education, improve its quality, and build resilient education systems for the affected youth, between ages of 15 to 30, both within Syria and in the region.

In the field of culture, UNESCO focuses on safeguarding Syria’s rich cultural heritage. Since the onset of the crisis, the Director-General has been strongly advocating in this respect by calling on all parties to the conflict and the Syrian authorities to respect and protect cultural heritage. Also, neighboring countries, INTERPOL and institutional partners have been alerted and mobilized to counter the illicit traffic of movable cultural heritage and UNESCO organized a high-level meeting on the Safeguarding of Syria’s Cultural Heritage in August 2013. The participants endorsed UNESCO’s Action Plan for emergency safeguarding measures and post-recovery actions. In the framework of this Action Plan, UNESCO has launched a three-year “Emergency Safeguarding of the Syrian Heritage project”, aimed at mitigating the destruction and loss of cultural heritage, preparing post-conflict priority actions, as well as the medium- and long-term actions, as a means to restore normalcy and social cohesion in Syria. As part of the project UNESCO established the International Observatory of Syrian Cultural Heritage that monitors and assesses the situation of cultural heritage in Syria.

Through its efforts, UNESCO encouraged the United Nations Security Council to adopt the Resolution 2199 that condemns the destruction of cultural heritage and adopts legally-binding measures to counter illicit trafficking of antiquities and cultural objects from Iraq and Syria. Furthermore, series of training activities on the fight against the illicit traffic of Syrian cultural objects and on state-of-art conservation and restoration tools of built heritage have

been organized in Syria and neighboring countries (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey). UNESCO and UNITAR (the UN Institute for Training and Research) signed an agreement to protect cultural and natural heritage sites with the latest geo-spatial technologies.

In addition, UNESCO has been conducting an awareness-raising campaign via social media to draw the general public's attention to the threats to Syrian cultural heritage along with a global Unite4Heritage campaign launched in March 2015. The purpose of the vastly popular campaign is to counter propaganda of hatred, intolerance and violence with messages of unity, tolerance and solidarity and to build support for the protection of heritage, where it is threatened by sectarianism and extreme violence. The campaign also generated media interest with over 500 articles in the international press.

OCHA (United Nation Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs)⁷²

OCHA is the part of the United Nations Secretariat responsible for bringing together humanitarian actors to ensure a coherent response to emergencies. OCHA also ensures there is a framework within which each actor can contribute to the overall response effort.

OCHA's mandate stems from General Assembly (GA) resolution 46/182 of December 1991, which states: "The leadership role of the Secretary-General is critical and must be strengthened to ensure better preparation for, as well as rapid and coherent response to, natural disasters and other emergencies."⁷³ To this end, it also establishes the role of the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), who works with the Secretary-General and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) in leading, coordinating and facilitating humanitarian assistance. OCHA is the office that provides support to the ERC and the Secretary-General to meet the leadership and coordination responsibilities charted in GA resolution 46/182.

⁷² <https://www.unocha.org/syrian-arab-republic/about-ocha-syria>

⁷³ <https://undocs.org/A/RES/46/182>

Across Syria, an estimated 11.7 million people are in need of various forms of humanitarian assistance, with certain population groups facing particularly high levels of vulnerability. Whilst there has been a reduction in violence in many parts of the country over the past year, the impact of present and past hostilities on civilians remains the principal driver of humanitarian needs in Syria.

The population continues to look for safety in parts of the country still affected by ongoing hostilities with significant protection needs, and new and protracted displacement, increased self-organized returns and the sustained erosion of communities' resilience persisting. The widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure, the depletion of savings, and limited economic opportunities have forced many to resort to harmful coping strategies and resulted in extreme vulnerability to additional shocks. Children, pregnant and lactating women, people with disabilities, the elderly and other groups or individuals with specific needs or diminished coping mechanisms are particularly at risk.

Syrians themselves, through family and community support structures, civil society and humanitarian non-governmental organizations, and state institutions at both central and local level, continue to be the main responders to the humanitarian crisis in Syria. Complementing their efforts, humanitarian organizations have mounted one of the largest humanitarian responses in the world. As the crisis endures, people's resourcefulness and national efforts alone remain insufficient to address needs which can only be mitigated through humanitarian assistance. Sufficient investments in more dignified and sustainable solutions to reduce dependency and increase resilience remained a key gap in the response due to insufficient resources.

It is worth mentioning that only in 2018 OCHA was responsible for the following:

- 5.3M people received food assistance.
- 2.7M people received agricultural assistance.

- 6M people received direct water, sanitation and hygiene kits and assistance.
- 22.8M medical procedures were supported by humanitarian actors.
- 4.3M children and teachers benefited from quality education programs.
- 838,400 girls and boys could access protection services, including psychosocial support.

UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)⁷⁴

UNHCR is governed by the UN General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The UNHCR Executive Committee approves the agency's biennial programmes and the corresponding budget. These are presented by the High Commissioner, who is appointed by the UN General Assembly.

Their mandate is defined by the 1950 UNHCR Statute⁷⁵. In 2003, the General Assembly extended the organization's mandate "until the refugee problem is solved." The High Commissioner reports annually to ECOSOC and the General Assembly on the work of UNHCR.

The main pillars of the work of UNHCR in Syria can be described as follows:

- Provision of emergency life-saving assistance to IDPs
UNHCR built its emergency response and management capacity in-house in Syria and developed its robust supply chain (stockpiles and warehouses in each field location, available frame agreements for core distribution items), its staffing expansion, increased office space and administrative support (AV fleet etc.).
- IDP protection and assistance program
In an IDP context, UNHCR focused on supporting national and international actors in mitigating protection risks and strengthening

⁷⁴ <https://www.unhcr.org/sy/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/02/End-of-Year-2018-S.pdf>

⁷⁵ <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/basic/3b66c39e1/statute-office-united-nations-high-commissioner-refugees.html>

resilience, reducing vulnerabilities of persons affected by the crisis and enhancing their protection through a wide range of integrated community-based activities.

- **Refugee protection and assistance program**
UNHCR continuously tried to mitigate the impact of the crisis on the refugee and asylum-seeker population and conducted core protection interventions, such as advocacy to preserve the asylum space, prevention of refoulement and detention, addressed SGBV and child protection concerns, mobilized the community to strengthen community-based protection mechanisms and conducted registration and refugee status determination, as well as provided documentation to enhance legal protection.
- **Winterization**
UNHCR has been the leading UN agency in providing need-based non-food items (NFI) assistance to displaced persons, returnees, host communities and other crisis-affected populations.
- **Preparation for returns and response to immediate and urgent needs of spontaneous returnees**
While fighting continued in some parts of Syria, military developments on the ground led to significant improvements in security conditions and, subsequently convinced civilians to return to their areas of origin. UNHCR was successful in ensuring that return was included in the HRP and resources were allocated to respond to immediate and urgent humanitarian needs of returning IDPs and refugees.

Conclusions

Basar Al Assad won the civil war in Syria, with the help of Iran and Russia. Assad succeeded mainly because of the violence, with which he faced the first anti-government demonstrations, radicalized the opposition, dominated by the

extreme Islamic elements. This scared the moderates and broke the opposition, which found it hard to find external support, at the same time that Iran, and later Vladimir Putin's Russia, openly supported the regime. For Putin, Syria became the easy field to reaffirm the status of Russia as a Great Power.

This conflict also gave birth to radical Islamic elements which created ISIS, a Caliphate that mankind hasn't witnessed before. ISIS was one key actor in the Syrian conflict and it took the involvement of US along with a coalition of forces to take actions in order to give a solution to this threat.

The cost of war is unpredictable. Syria has been destroyed and nearly half of the country's population, 11 million Syrians, have left their homes. Half of them found shelter as refugees in third countries, mainly in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Germany, and the other half as internally displaced in Syria. More than a third of the Syrian territory, especially in the east, continues to be outside Damascus's control, with most of it occupied by the Kurds.

United Nations tried with many ways to give an end to this conflict and to save the lives of millions of Syrians but unsuccessful in some occasions mainly because of the different wills and opinions of its member – states. A lot of criticism was expressed about UN's efforts and the Syrian crisis will act as a lesson for upcoming similar events. But even with this criticism no one can doubt the efforts made by UN bodies that brought better living conditions for million Syrians.

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