**SKYMUN 2014 Chair Research Report**

**Committee:** Security Council

**Issue:** The Situation in Syria

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1. Description of Issue

Syria has been in national turmoil since March 2011. The civil war began with protests against Syria’s current president, Bashar al-Assad, and his regime in the southern city of Daraa. When 14 school children were arrested and tortured for writing the slogan of an uprising, “The people want the downfall of the regime,” on a wall, the locals demanded their release. These protesters also demanded the rise of democracy and greater freedom, though they did not directly mention Assad’s complete resignation.

President Bashar al-Assad has been in power since 2000, when he succeeded his father, Hafez al-Assad, who had also ruled Syria in an authoritarian manner, and was even accused of infringing upon human rights for the 30 years when he was in power.

Since his rise to power, Assad has concentrated all political, business, and military power in the hands of his own family and the minority Shiite Alawite people, which makes up 12% of Syria’s population. This has brought up numerous claims of corruption among the majority Sunni members, the largest protesters against Assad’s regime today.

The Syrian civil war has been on a bloody stalemate for 3 years, with 120,000 deaths and millions of refugees, which account for a third of the entire population. During this period, the al-Qaeda affiliated group, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), has grown ever more powerful in Syria, seeking the “complete control over the liberated areas.” Meanwhile, the Free Syrian Army has been fighting the “violent and barbaric” al-Qaeda fighters at 24 locations over the past 6 months, as well as the Assad army. In addition, China and Russia have vetoed numerous Security Council resolutions that was aimed to halt the violence in Syria in 2012. With President Assad’s determination to run for reelection in 2014, tensions have worsened. Damascus has vowed to continue fighting the opposition forces, while the National Coalition and Free Syrian Army have claimed to refuse any forms of negotiations before Assad’s resignation.

In 2013, chemical weapons were used by the Syrian government against the opposition forces and the civilians. This usage of chemical weapons violates the Geneva Protocol, and has killed thousands of civilians of all ages in an inhumane, instantaneous, and destructive manner. Therefore, the United Nations and various nations intervened in order to completely eradicate the deadly weapons from Syria. In 2013, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) produced a plan (which to Syrian government agreed to implement) to eliminate Syria’s chemical weapon stockpiles. Norway and Denmark are offering merchant ships to transport these chemical weapons, while the Unites States is providing ships on which chemical weapons would be transported and destroyed at sea. In exchange for the destruction of chemical weapons, the United States has vowed to not strike Damascus, the Syrian capital.

In a Geneva Conference held in Switzerland on 21 November 2013, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and United States discussed ways to provide humanitarian aid to the thousands of civilians threatened of starvation in Syria’s central cities such as Homs, Darayya, and Moadmiyeh. The Geneva II Conference, which was also held in Switzerland on 22 January, 2014, aimed to provide the best opportunity to halt the bloodshed, and find a mutually acceptable transitional government that will restore peace in Syria. Representatives from Russia, United States, United Nations, Britain, European Union, the Assad regime, the Syrian opposition, and Syria’s bordering nations have participated. Plans were outlined by the Western nations and Russia. However, on the day of the Geneva II Conference, Syrian government representative and representatives from the primary opposition forces have exchanged bitter accusations, in which opposition forces and United States demanded that President Assad step down. United States Secretary of State John Kerry went so far as to say “We see only one option, a negotiated transition government formed by mutual consent... That means that Bashar al-Assad will not be part of that transition government.”

2. Definition of Key Terms

- **National Coalition**: The purpose of the National Coalition is to permanently remove the current president, Bashar al-Assad from the Syrian government as well as “its symbols and pillars of support.” It refuses to negotiate with the al-Assad government, calling it responsible for the deaths of Syrians, destruction of Syria, and displacement of Syria. The National Coalition also continues today to strive to unify with and support the Free Syrian Army. Indeed, on May 31st, the National Coalition accepted 15 representatives from the Free Syrian Army. This has allowed political representation of the opposition forces for the first time in Syria.

- **Free Syrian Army**: As anti-regime demonstrations heated up in summer 2011, members of Assad's army began to join to the protesters' side. These officers and soldiers eventually formed the nucleus of the Free Syrian Army, the main armed group opposed to Assad. The Free Syrian Army includes jihadists, and it enjoys the Western support.

- **Alawites**: Muslim minority group that accounts for around 12% of Syria’s population. The current president of Syria, Assad, is an Alawite minority. Alawites follow the Shiite interpretation, claiming that succession should be based upon bloodlines.

- **Sunnis**: Muslim majority in Syria. Sunnis believe that succession to prophet Mohammed should follow Mohammed’s most pious and able companions. Sunnis are primarily opposed to the current president Assad’s regime as well as his potential to continue his rule. They are, in fact, the largest group of protesters in Syria.

- **Arab League**: An association of Arab states established in 1945 to promote cooperation among member nations in matters relating to the economic and social development of Arab nations, and their foreign policy. The Arab League has pledged to “hold talks with Syrian opposition groups about the transition to democracy.”

- **The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS)**: Jihadist group thriving in Iraq and Syria. ISIS was formed in April 2013 from al-Qaeda's organization in Iraq. It is now one of the main Jihadist groups fighting the Assad regime in Syria. ISIS’s fighters, which includes as many as 70,000 soon-to-be Jihadists, is challenging not only the Syrian government, but also the secular and Islamic opposition groups in Syria.

**- Geneva II Conference:** Peace conference held in Geneva, Switzerland on January 22, 2014. The purpose of the Geneva II Conference is to lay out a political transition plan for Syria. Delegates from Russia, United States, United Nations, European Union, the Assad regime, the Syrian opposition, and other Syria-related nations are seeking in earnest, ways to restore peace in Syria. The Conference has so far involved bitter accusations to and from the Syrian government and its main political opposition forces. The opposition forces and United States demanded President Bashar al-Assad to step down from power, and the Syrian National Coalition’s president Ahmad Jarba demanded Assad’s power be transferred to an interim government that will rebuild Syria.

3. Timeline of Key Events

**2000 June** - Bashar Assad becomes President.

**2001 September** - Continued detention of pro-reform activists crushes any possibility of a halt in authoritarian regime.

**2011 March** - Protests in the cities of Damascus and Deraa demand the release of political prisoners in Syria. Government forces fire at the civilians, which triggers days of violence, and eventually spreads throughout the nation. The Syrian government attempts to alleviate the national instability by releasing dozens of political prisoners.

**2011 July** - After countless government attacks against mass demonstrations and numerous deaths, opposition activists meet in Istanbul to unite their forces.

**2011 October** - Syrian National Council forms. China and Russia veto the UN Security Council resolution condemning Syria.

**2012 February** - Russia and China veto a UN Security Council resolution on Syria, while Assad continues to bombard major cities such as Homs. More than 7500 people have died since 2011.

**2012 May** - UN Security Council strongly condemns Syrian government's use of destructive weaponry and the military killing of more than 100 civilians in Houla. France, United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Spain, Canada and Australia order their diplomats in Syria to return to their nations as a form of protest against the Syrian government.

**2012 August** - The Civil War continues. A UN General Assembly resolution commands President Assad to resign. United State’s President Obama warns Syrian government that Syrian use of chemical weapons will results in the intervention of the United States.

**2012 November** - Several major opposition forces unite as the “National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces” at a meeting in Qatar. One of the participants is the Syrian National Council.

**2012 December** - The United States, United Kingdom, France, Turkey and Gulf states acknowledges the National Coalition as the only " legitimate representative" of the Syrian people.

**2013 April** - United States and United Kingdom demand investigation for the presence of chemical weapons in the Syrian Civil War.

**2013 September** - UN Weapons Inspectors detect the usage of chemical weapons in an attack on Damascus in August. This attack killed more than 300 people.

**2013 October** - President Assad allows international inspectors to destroy Syria's chemical weapons, as decided by the US-Russian agreement. A plan drafted by the OPCW is subsequently accepted by the Assad regime.

4. Positions of External Entities

- **Iran**: Iran is primarily a Shiite population, and is therefore, a key ally of Syrian regime. Iran will participate in Geneva II conference, but will not accept any preconditions.

- **Saudi Arabia**: Saudi Arabia is primarily a Sunni population, and therefore, supports the opposition forces.

- **Russia**: Russia is a vital supplier of the Syrian regime. Russia has defended Assad from Western demands for United Nation’s sanctions and from opposition’s demands that he resign before negotiations take place. In fact, Russia has recently gone so far as to blame the opposition forces in Syria for delaying the peace conferences because of the opposition’s unwillingness to accept Assad’s participation in the Geneva Conference.

- **United States, United Kingdom, France (and some conservative Arab allies)**: These nations fund and arm the opposition forces in Syria. They have been doing so from the beginning of the Civil War in 2011. In fact, the United States has been funding “rebels” against the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, since the mid 1990s.

- **Turkey, Lebanon, Israel**: These nations are key players in the Civil War because they are the nations with the most Syrian refugees. Each nation provides refuge for hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees.

- **Norway, Denmark**: These two nations have been offering merchant ships to help transport chemicals weapons into disposal spots.

- **United States**: The United States has provided ships on which toxic chemicals can be transported, then destroyed at sea. In return for Syria’s promise to dispose of their chemical weapons, the United States has confirmed not to strike Damascus.

5. Suggested Solutions

**1)** Encourages member nations to intervene in the Civil War by providing defense for the civilians, solely in order to decrease the number of unnecessary civilian casualties and deaths.

**2)** Demands organizations such as the European Union to lift arms embargo on opposition forces that represent the civilians, and fight for freedom and representation of the people.

**3)** Requires biannual peace talks to take place with both key and neutral members such as the United States, Russia, China, Syria, Iran, Turkey, Lebanon, Israel, and Iran, as well as the P5 nations in the Security Council, cooperating to achieve political settlement in Syria without the usage of blind violence.

**4)** Necessitates the continuing delivery of humanitarian aid including food, water, blankets, and basic human needs to refugees in both bordering nations such as Jordan, Lebanon, Israel and Turkey, and to those within Syria.

**5)** Pushes for a UN Security Council consensus on having regular checkups on the stockpile of chemical weapons in Syria. Any chemical weapons found in this manner will be destroyed.

**6)** Urges the UN Security Council to suspend other weapons of mass destruction in Syria, which have been causing numerous civilian casualties and deaths.

**7)** Urge UN Security Council to send representatives to ensure a fair and just election, that reflects the majority, in 2014.

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